THE PASSIONS OF THE FRENCH ROMANTICS

FRANCIS GRIBBLE

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BERNARDIN DE SAINT-PIERRE

[*Frontispiece*

THE PASSIONS OF THE FRENCH ROMANTICS

BY

FRANCIS GRIBBLE

AUTHOR OF
'MADAME DE STAËL AND HER LOVERS,' 'GEORGE SAND AND HER LOVERS,'
'ROUSSEAU AND THE WOMEN HE LOVED,' 'CHATEAUBRIAND AND
HIS COURT OF WOMEN'

WITH TWENTY PORTRAITS

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PREFACE

Some remarks which might have served as a Preface having found their way into the First Chapter, the actual Preface need contain little beyond the author's acknowledgements of his indebtedness to predecessors in the field. The chief of these is M. Léon Séché, whose monographs on Lamartine, Alfred de Vigny, Sainte-Beuve, Alfred de Musset, and Juliette Drouet, contain much new matter, and present it graphically, gracefully and wittily. M. Michaud's monograph on Sainte-Beuve's *Livre d'Amour* is another scholarly composition of great value. Many of the misstatements in Aimé-Martin's Life of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre have been convincingly exposed by M. Maury, and M. Maurice Souriau. M. René Doumic has published some of "Elvire's" most passionate letters to Lamartine. One is indebted to Mr. Wellington Wack for a selection of Juliette Drouet's letters to Victor Hugo. It would have been impossible to undertake the exposure of the Hugo legend if the way had not been paved by the erudite labours of M. Edmond Biré; and the account of Prosper Mérimée's "Inconnue" would have been incomplete but for the

help of M. Alphonse Lefebvre. The works of various contributors to Hachette's admirable series: "Les grands écrivains français" have also been very useful; and if mention has been inadvertently omitted of any other source from which help has been derived, apologies are hereby tendered.

It will be observed—it is to be hoped that it will not be objected—that the present volume contains very little literary criticism. Any reader who will place himself for a moment at the author's point of view will perceive the reasons why it has been excluded. The principal reason is that there was no room for it; and, that being so, perhaps the other reasons do not matter. When one is telling a story, criticism is apt to get in the way; and the more interesting the story the more is the intrusion of criticism likely to be resented. An admirable work on the literature of the Romantic Movement has been written by Professor Brandes; and if the present work induces any fresh reader to refer to it, a useful purpose will have been served.

In these pages, however,—the reader must be fairly warned—little besides stories will be found; and there shall be no apologies for telling them. If they have been properly told, they ought to be entertaining; however they have been told, they ought to be instructive. The period of the Romantic Movement was a period of experiments in life as well as in literature; and there is nothing unnatural in a curiosity to know whether they failed or succeeded.

Preface

The material on which an answer to that important question can be grounded is ample; but it is scattered, and very little of it has hitherto been accessible in English. A great deal of it, in fact, has only recently been made accessible in French. Here it is brought together, to help students to take a synoptic view of it and to consider for themselves whether—or how far—the Romantics really served the cause of the liberty of the human spirit by that anarchism in their amours which was their common characteristic.

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The Passions of the French Romantics

CHAPTER I

What the Romantic Movement was—Love as the source of inspiration—Reasons for presenting the history of the Romantic Movement in the shape of a series of love stories.

From the point of view of the historian of literature the Romantic Movement may be sufficiently described as the great revolt against the shackles of old-fashioned literary conventions.

There had grown up, in the course of the eighteenth century, something of the nature of a Code of Literary Jurisprudence. Rigid rules had been allowed to fetter the freedom of writers in their choice and in their treatment of subjects; the voice of authority declared that, unless a man conformed to those rules, his work was of no account. The Romantics broke the rules with gestures not less defiant than that of Moses breaking the Table of the Law, and compelled authority to reckon with their iconoclasm and respect it. Their principal battle-field was the theatre; they won their most famous victory on the first night of *Hernani*, with Victor Hugo for their champion and Théophile Gautier's conspicuous red waistcoat for their *oriflamme*.

That is an old story, however; and it is enough to refer to it without repeating it; for the Romantic Movement comprehended a good deal more than a mere revolution in literary methods. It also included a new attitude towards life, and a new conception of the relations which should subsist between life and literature. Just as it has been laid down that the man who would be a great epic poet must make his own life a great epic poem, so the leaders of the Romantic School proceeded on the assumption that a contribution to romantic literature must be the reflection of a romantic personality.

Their view of the matter may be illustrated by a story told about Buloz, the editor and proprietor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. George Sand and Alfred de Musset were included among his contributors. He introduced them to each other, so it is said, in the fond hope and firm belief that they would fall in love, and quarrel, and draw inspiration from their experiences—in which case what splendid copy for his paper! *Si non e vero*. . . . The expectation, if entertained, was indeed most abundantly fulfilled, as witness *La confession d'un enfant du siècle* and *Elle et Lui*, and a long series of passionate poems *à clef*. And, in the golden age of Romanticism, that was the sort of thing that was continually happening.

Not, of course, that the Romantics invented, or even discovered, love. Love, we may take it, is a great deal older than literature; many men and women had loved and written of love before the turn of the Romantics came. They were the first, however, who put love, so to say, on the programme, took it seriously as an experience and as a pageant, and

regarded it as an integral part of the liberal education of a man or woman of letters. And, in doing so, they not only, as was inevitable, enhanced the literary importance of love, but also modified its literary character.

In the writings—and also presumably in the lives—of their predecessors, love had chiefly figured as gallantry; and the early love stories had been, more often than not, what we should call stories for the smoking-room. The secret of Rousseau's enormous popularity was that for this atmosphere of gallantry and impropriety he substituted an atmosphere of sentiment. He found men a little difficult to convince at first that the change was for the better; but the women always heard him gladly, and the men came round to the women's opinion by degrees.

Chateaubriand did so for one, in spite of his constant and almost spiteful disparagement of his master. His complaint against Rousseau was not that he was sentimental, but that his sentiment, or sentimentalism, was forced and false. He sneers at it as the sentimentalism of a *parvenu*—so different from that of a *grand seigneur*. He himself, he represents, was sentimental on a larger scale and in a grander style; and his *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* may be read as a challenge to the reader to point, if he can, to any other more splendidly and consistently sentimental man. Certainly it might be hard to point to a man who shed the glamour of his sentiment on a larger number of women.

In spite of his boast, however, he was presently to be surpassed, if indeed he had not already been surpassed at the time when he wrote. Sentiment was by no means, as he supposed, to be the last word about

love among the men of the Romantic School. It was presently to evolve into passion, and passion was presently to express itself in the language of public worship. Woman was to be exalted as the incarnation of the divine ; her affections—and also her infidelities and her caprices—were to be accepted as the supreme source of inspiration, and the determining factor in a literary man's outlook on the world.

We begin to come to that in the case of Lamartine. There is already a hint of it in his story of his love for "Graziella," and the point of view is fully and finally attained in his story of his passion for "Elvire," which shall be told in its proper place. That passion, which had all the intensity of a religion, revealed to him his genius as a poet. Once, forty years or more after her death, he was publicly referred to as "the lover of Elvire" at a meeting of the French Academy; and while the rest of the assemblage smiled, M. de Lamartine, says the journalist who relates the story, "maintained a decorous and melancholy silence." For life and literature were, in his case, intimately interwoven, and he knew that, if he had not been the lover of Elvire, he would never have won fame as the author of the *Méditations poétiques*.

And as with him, so with the others in the measure of their strength and idiosyncrasies. They all—or nearly all—went to love for their inspiration. None of them—or hardly any of them—made any secret of their doing so. Victor Hugo, as we shall see, took a third-rate actress from the theatre and installed her ostentatiously as his Muse, even going so far as to invite his friends to subscribe towards the cost of the installation. Sainte-Beuve wrote, and printed, a poem

with the dots on almost all the i's, for the purpose of informing all who read it that he and Madame Victor Hugo loved each other. George Sand comported herself after the fashion which caused the cynic to remark that, in her case, whenever a woman desired to change her lover, God was always there to facilitate the transfer. Alfred de Vigny, generalizing from a single instance, founded a complete doctrine of philosophic pessimism on the fact that Marie Dorval, the great tragédienne, had been untrue to him. And so forth through the list.

The Romantic Movement, that is to say, looked at from this point of view, appears as a movement for linking up literature with love ; and it further became, when the women entered into the spirit of it, a movement for their emancipation from the code which condemned love, in their case, as a weakness of which they ought to be ashamed.

George Sand's view of this branch of the subject has been mentioned, and is well known. She did not scruple to boast, at a dinner-party at which Flaubert, Dumas *fils*, and the brothers de Goncourt were present, that she had been, as she said, "grande amoureuse" ; and she claimed the same distinction, as she esteemed it, for her friends Mesdames d'Agoult and de Girardin. Nor was she the only woman of her period who took that line with frank audacity. Hortense Allart de Méritens—she who seduced Chateaubriand, at the age of sixty-one, from his allegiance to Madame Récamier—expressed herself every whit as openly. She would advise any girl in her position, she said, to "follow nature boldly," just as she had done ; and she would warn such a one that, if she

resisted nature, "nothing but torment would be her lot," and it would be better for her to die at once.

There, then, we have the note—or at all events the loudest and most insistent note—of the Romantic Movement; and there too we have the reason why the history of that Movement can be presented in a series of love stories as effectively as in any other shape. The stories are interesting in themselves, and may also form a convenient framework for criticism.

Strictly speaking, one ought to begin with Rousseau, for the Romantic Movement has been justly dated from the day on which Jean-Jacques ran away from Geneva and found a refuge with Madame de Warens. His story, however, is familiar, and has been exhaustively treated in a recent volume. So has Chateaubriand's story, which may be omitted for the same reason. Next to Chateaubriand in the order of literary succession come Nodier and Lamartine; but before we speak of them it will be proper to hark back to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre.

Perhaps he was not a very great man. Though he wrote one little masterpiece, he also wrote an immense amount of rubbish. His fame is certainly less than that of either Rousseau, from whom he took the torch, or Chateaubriand, to whom he handed it. Yet, when all is said, *Paul et Virginie* has more readers to-day than either *Atala* or *La nouvelle Héloïse;* and—what is more to our immediate purpose—its author was a romantic figure. He had "lived the life"—more or less, but, at any rate, to the best of his ability—before he sat down to be romantic in cold print; and therefore we will begin with him.

CHAPTER II

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre—His friendship with Rousseau—The influence of *The Lives of the Saints*—And of *Robinson Crusoe*—A sea voyage—Military service—Ambitious projects—Bernardin at Amsterdam—He receives a proposal of marriage—His hurried departure—Arrival at St. Petersburg.

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was the personal link between Rousseau and the Romantics.

Chateaubriand, when Jean-Jacques died, was a child of ten, living in Brittany, and had never even seen him. Madame de Staël, a child of twelve, living in Paris, may have seen him, but can hardly have known him, though her father had been one of his admirers. Bernardin, a visitor to Madame Necker's salon, was a man of forty-one, and had been Jean-Jacques' intimate friend, and his disciple.

Their friendship had begun with a misunderstanding and a quarrel. The disciple had sent the master a parcel of coffee as a token of his homage and regard; and the master, instead of showing gratitude, had accused the disciple of taking a liberty. "You hardly know me, and yet you dare to offer me presents," said Jean-Jacques. "You must come and fetch your coffee away, or else our acquaintance must terminate;" but Bernardin reasoned with him speciously. He had far more coffee in the house, he said, than he needed for his own consumption. He thought it rather good coffee, and would like Jean-Jacques' opinion of it. If Jean-Jacques cared to make him some trifling present

in return, he would accept it gratefully. So Jean-Jacques gave Bernárdin a jar of ginger and a treatise on ichthyology; and harmonious relations were established on that basis.

That was at the time when Jean-Jacques, having finished his wanderings over the face of the earth, had settled down in Paris. Bernardin, admitted to his intimacy, became the companion of his daily walks. Meeting in a café in the Champs Elysées, they used to proceed to the Bois de Boulogne, and there botanize and sentimentalize, contrasting the open heart of nature with the gross passions and sordid interests of humankind. Jean-Jacques was moved to tears, and stopped in the midst of the wood to embrace Bernardin, when Bernardin told him how once, in his childhood, he had been kind to a stray cat; and Bernardin listened reverently to Jean-Jacques' confession that he would rather brave the arrows of the Parthians than be stared at by his fellow-creatures.

For Bernardin, to whom success came late in life, was not yet famous, and was still impressionable; and he and Jean-Jacques had much in common. He had felt the influence of *Émile* and *Le vicaire Savoyard* and *La nouvelle Héloïse*, and yet had hardly needed it, having made an independent start upon the sentimental road. Like Jean-Jacques, he had seen visions and dreamed dreams, and had turned to literature, not as a rhetorical exercise or an intellectual diversion, but as a mode of self-expression. Like Jean-Jacques, again, he had been a wanderer, and had sucked the sap from multifarious experiences.

Neither he nor his master, so far as one knows, held any explicit romantic theories as to the bearing of life

on books. They were not Romantics, but the unconscious precursors of Romanticism, guided not by doctrines but by instinct, and building better than they knew. But they both struck the personal note because it seemed the obvious note to strike, and put themselves into their books because it seemed the natural thing to do; and there were points of similarity in their sentimental recollections which may well have furnished topics for their talk, though one suspects Bernardin of having done most of the talking on that branch of the subject. In the literature of sentiment he was only a disciple; but, if it was a question of comparing successes in the actual lists of love, then he had the advantage of his master.

Il me fallait des princesses, Jean-Jacques had written; but that was only the ideal. Though he had sighed for princesses, princesses had not sighed for him. His love-making had never, in fact, risen much above the level of chambering and wantonness; whereas his young friend had received an offer of marriage in nearly every country in Europe, and had not only loved a princess but been, albeit only temporarily, beloved by one.

Born at Havre, in 1737, Bernardin was of quite modest origin; and when, in later life, he boasted that he was descended from Eustache de Saint-Pierre, the hero of the Siege of Calais, he did not speak the truth. His father was a director or manager of the Havre packets, and his mother's brother was a skipper in the merchant service. His family, that is to say, belonged to the *petite bourgeoisie;* and the career for which he seemed obviously destined was one of respectable but

impecunious mediocrity. Fortunately, however—or unfortunately, as one prefers—he read two books which put whimsical ideas into his head.

One of the books was *The Lives of the Saints*, and the other was *Robinson Crusoe;* and it is quite clear that a clever boy who has entered into the spirit of those two works—especially the latter of them—will not willingly consent to be apprenticed to a trade or tethered to a desk. Bernardin, at any rate, would not. He dreamed of being an anchorite, a barefooted friar, a missionary, a martyr, an explorer, a colonizer—anything rather than the slave of commercial routine in a provincial town; and he once went so far as to run away from home and hide in a wood beside a brook, expecting the ravens to feed him as they fed Elijah.

The ravens disappointed him—the nuts and blackberries were unsatisfying; so he got hungry and returned home. The proper thing to do with a boy of such tastes was, it was felt, to send him to sea; and Bernardin was duly packed off on his uncle's ship to Martinique. A rough voyage and a severe bout of sea-sickness, however, convinced him that he had no vocation for the seafaring life; and he returned not only to home but to school. The Jesuits, with whom he was placed at Caen, would gladly have made a missionary of him, as he wished; but his father's objections prevailed. He was at the head of the school in mathematics. The reasonable course was to make him an engineer; and to that end he was sent, at the age of twenty, to the Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées, at Paris, whence, at the expiration of a year, he obtained a commission in a corps of sappers.

Exactly how he obtained it is not very clear; but there is some reason to believe that he borrowed, or otherwise got possession of, another man's testimonials, and entered the royal service under that other man's name. However that may be, he did at any rate see service in Hesse in the Seven Years' War; but he quarrelled with his superiors and was sent home. An appointment which he obtained in Malta was forfeited for the same reason; and he found himself once more in Paris, nearly penniless, but earning a precarious livelihood as a mathematical instructor of candidates for the service which he had quitted under a cloud.

He knocked in vain at this time at the doors of patrons, and bombarded Cabinet ministers with unacceptable propositions. One of those to whom he applied for help was the Marquis de Mirabeau; "but the friend of man," says his biographer, "being occupied in writing a large work on the happiness of the human race, had no leisure to concern himself with the particular interests of individuals." One of his proposals, addressed to the Naval Minister, was that he should be commissioned to set out alone in a small boat and make a chart of the coasts of England; but "this remarkable memorandum failed even to excite curiosity, and was left unanswered." Moreover, Bernardin "had exhausted his credit with the baker"; and "his landlady was threatening to turn him into the street."

Not a hopeful moment, one would say, for the commencement of a high adventure; but Bernardin had courage and ideas. The idea of going out in a small boat to chart the coasts of England was only one

idea among many. As an alternative he was prepared to found a colony and provide it with a code of laws; and, if the French Government would not employ him in that capacity, another Government might. Catherine the Great had lately succeeded to the throne of Russia. She was a good cosmopolitan, hospitable to foreigners, eager to reorganize her Empire on sound philosophic lines. A proposal to establish a philosophic settlement on the shores of the Aral Sea would probably appeal to her practical mind. Bernardin would go to St. Petersburg and seek an audience.

"He quite understood," says his biographer, Aimé-Martin, "that he would require a little money in order to carry through so great an enterprise; but he would have been unworthy of his high fortune if he had allowed such a trifling obstacle to obstruct him." He borrowed from his friends, therefore—twenty francs from an old school-fellow, similar small sums from casual acquaintances, 150 francs in all; he sold his books and as much of his wardrobe as he could spare; he obtained two letters of introduction—one to the Hanoverian Ambassador at the Hague, and the other to the Military Governor of Lübeck—and he booked his seat in the diligence and set out. The story reads like a daring and fanciful romance, but it is true. Bernardin placed his trust in miracles; and the miracles happened, and kept on happening.

Even at the Hague he was given his chance, though he failed to seize it. The Hanoverian Ambassador was an alchemist and wanted an assistant to help him in the search for the philosopher's stone. He was willing to give Bernardin a salaried sinecure if he would join him in the quest. Bernardin, however,

knew nothing of alchemy, and would not pretend that he did. His heart was set on his colony, and this road did not lead to it; whereas, if he proceeded to Amsterdam, all would be well.

He went on to Amsterdam, with hardly a penny in his pocket; and the stars in their courses fought for him. A certain Frenchman called Mustel was living at Amsterdam, and Bernardin had once worked under a school-master of that name. Perhaps, he thought, there might be some relationship between the two men.

It turned out that the two men were brothers. It also turned out that M. Mustel, a journalist and editor of the *Gazette de Hollande*, was glad to see his brother's friend and willing to do his best for him, and able to make him a practical and business-like offer. He smoked a pipe with him in a summer-house, at the end of his garden, where he was making up the paper, took his measure, was pleased with him, introduced him to the ladies of his family, and came out plump with his generous proposal. "I have a sister-in-law," he said, "and I have a newspaper. I control the fortunes of both of them. You had better marry the one and become sub-editor of the other. Your salary shall be one thousand ducats a year."

The story shows us, as clearly as any story can, what manner of man Bernardin was. He was likeable, personable, and dashing—the sort of man who always falls on his feet among strangers because he always makes friends and inspires confidence: a ladies' man, too, as we shall have many occasions to see as we proceed; for this, as we shall also see, was only the first of a long series of offers of marriage made to him. His reasons for declining it, in the absence of

specific information about the lady concerned, can only be conjectured. It may have been that she was too homely; it may have been that Bernardin considered an early marriage a premature and too summary solution of the sentimental problem; it may even have been that he was really wedded to his scheme for the colonization of the shores of the Aral Sea. At all events, he did decline it, and moved on—somewhat hurriedly—after borrowing money.

M. Mustel paid his fare as far as Lübeck. The Military Governor of Lübeck, to whom he had a letter, paid his fare thence to St. Petersburg, whither he repaired by sea. The voyage lasted a month; and he landed in the Russian capital towards the end of 1762—the year, be it noted, in which his future friend and master, Jean-Jacques, fled from French persecution to the Val de Travers in the territory of Neuchâtel.

His face was still his fortune—that and his engaging manner. He had a stout heart and plenty of self-confidence, but his fortune was yet to make. He had only six francs in his pocket, and unless miracles happened, he would be in a poor way.

But miracles did happen, and went on happening.

CHAPTER III

Bernardin presented to Catherine the Great—He finds favour in her eyes—Gets a commission as captain—Employed in the War Office—Receives a second offer of marriage—Declines it and proceeds to Warsaw—Falls in love with Princess Marie Miesnik—Intervention of the Princess's mother—Bernardin resigns himself to the inevitable and goes away—Inaccuracies in his version of the story.

THOUGH life was cheap at St. Petersburg in the eighteenth century, six francs could not support Bernardin there for long; and he soon found that landladies in Russia inclined to the same view of his destitute situation as landladies in France. But then, when eviction seemed imminent, the miracles came to his aid, just as in a fairy-tale or a melodrama.

Bernardin went to church, and, in the porch, got into conversation with a stranger in a fur-lined overcoat. The stranger turned out to be the private secretary of M. de Munich, the Military Governor. He offered Bernardin an introduction to M. de Munich, who could always find employment for competent military engineers; and Bernardin, having been presented, and examined, and having demonstrated his capacity, M. de Munich passed him on to M. de Villebois, Commandant of the Artillery at Moscow. He was given a commission as sub-lieutenant, and "being a young man, was not insensible to the elegance of his new uniform of scarlet with black facings."

It was a good beginning—for a gay uniform is a great help to advancement if a man looks well in it; and Bernardin's new friends were anxious to advance him—and for a reason. Catherine the Great, as all the world knows, was, like George Sand, *grande amoureuse*. She allowed—or was believed to allow—her paramours to influence her policy. Consequently it would be a good thing for France if a Frenchman found favour in her eyes. M. de Breteuil[1] had been appointed Ambassador to Russia in the hope that he might do so; but being, as it happened, in love with his own wife, he had disappointed the expectations of his country. It seemed to him, however, and to those about him, that Bernardin, who cut such a dashing figure in his scarlet coat, and had no domestic obligations, might very well conquer the favours to which he was too good a husband to aspire; and Bernardin was, therefore, presented to the Empress with that end in view.

It was a game, apparently, of cross-purposes. Bernardin, as his biographer assures us, desired his audience solely in order that he might unfold his scheme for the colonization of the shores of the Aral Sea. His friends, on their part, procured it for him solely in order to give him a chance of supplanting Orloff[2] in the great Catherine's affection. The audience was granted; but things did not fall out exactly as

[1] The diplomatist whom Louis XV employed to intrigue against the policy of his own ministers at foreign courts. A very obstinate reactionary. His nomination to succeed Necker brought about the fall of the Bastille.

[2] One of the conspirators who overthrew Peter III. He was the principal (though not always the sole) favourite for ten years or more, at the end of which time Potemkin supplanted him in the Imperial affections.

either he or they had hoped. The colonization scheme was propounded and smiled upon, but pigeon-holed and forgotten. The Empress was impressed by the gallant figure of the handsome stranger; but her heart was capacious, and she was not "exclusive in her affections." Bernardin was added to her "list," but Orloff was not removed from it. Bernardin, in short, was the favourite of a day and a night, but obtained no serious consideration for his humanitarian plans, and got nothing, even for himself, except "favours" and promotion to the rank of captain.

Gradually, indeed, he found himself dropping out of military and aristocratic society, and seeking his friends among the resident foreign *bourgeoisie*—Duval the Swiss jeweller, Torelli the Italian painter, and some others of equally modest status. Moreover, those who had been his friends at Court were in disgrace, and he himself who, if he might not found a colony, desired at least to prove that he was a dashing soldier, was employed, not in the field, but at a desk in the War Office. Taking one consideration with another, he concluded that it was time to go—and that in spite of his friend General du Bosquet's endeavours to detain him.

"Stay with us," said the General. "I am childless, so you shall be my son. You shall marry my niece, Mademoiselle de la Tour, who is, like yourself, young, of amiable character, French, and unfortunate. You don't mind, do you? You are willing? But of course you are. I am rich, and I will give you all you need."

That was the second of the offers of marriage which

were showered upon Bernardin with such remarkable regularity. There seem to have been moments in his later life when he regretted not having accepted it. He speaks, at all events, in the *Harmonies*, of Russia as one of the countries in which his "love affairs did not turn out well"; but that was evidently an after-thought. At the moment, we may take it, marriage still seemed the wrong, because the obvious, solution; and he preferred to borrow two hundred francs from Duval and go to Poland. For if miracles happened in Russia, why should they not happen in Poland too?

They did.

It was in June 1764 that Bernardin arrived at Warsaw, where he found the Poles divided into factions, intriguing, conspiring, and fighting. Of course, as an adventurer, he plunged into the fray without troubling to understand the rights and wrongs of it. He had never heard of Prince Radziwill before, he wrote, but had merely taken his part because he seemed to be unfortunate. That was his excuse to the Russian Prince who had cut short his Quixotic career by taking him prisoner; and the marvel is that the excuse was actually accepted. M. Hennin, the French Resident, had applied for his release in vain, and been told that, whatever his merits as a French subject, he had committed an offence for which he must be punished; but his own audacious appeal to a chivalrous enemy gained him not only his freedom, but an invitation to dinner and a cordial reception in the best society of Warsaw. One might hesitate to believe the story if it rested on the sole authority of his biographer, who derived his

information from Bernardin himself; but it is confirmed in all its essential details by Hennin's dispatches to the French Foreign Minister, still to be seen in the Archives of the French Foreign Office.

Hennin, it appears from this source, employed Bernardin for a time as a secret diplomatic agent to gather political gossip in drawing-rooms and boudoirs; but the most interesting incidents of his stay at Warsaw have nothing to do with politics. "So far," writes Aimé-Martin, "we have seen the splendid days of his youth protected from love by ambition, but now he was to learn what love was, and to forget everything in that fatal passion." He had hesitated long, the biographer adds, before lifting the veil of secrecy and giving the details to the public; for his Life of M. de Saint-Pierre was not meant to be read as either a "romance" or a "confession." But M. de Saint-Pierre's experiences had inspired his genius; it was his vivid recollection of them that enabled him to depict the love of Paul for Virginie; and therefore it seemed right to tell.

The lady, he goes on, was a princess: the Princess Marie Miesnik; and she was remarkable among other women for "her love of virtue." Bernardin met her at all the brilliant fêtes to which he was invited. She seemed to "share his tastes, divine his thoughts, and abandon herself to the irresistible agitations of a secret sentiment." With others she was "lively and frivolous"; with him she was "sympathetic and thoughtful." But, on the other hand, "whether from caprice or from a wish to test her power over him, she alternately flattered his hopes and filled his soul with doubts"—which is the eighteenth-century way of

saying that she flirted with him; so that—the social gulf between them being great—it was not easy for Bernardin to know whether she really meant to do more than break a country heart for pastime.

Certainty, however—or what he took for such—came to him when he received an invitation to visit her mother's country seat. He was filled with melancholy thoughts, hoping, despairing, doubting—*elle et lui, voilà l'univers*—when she stepped out of the house and joined him in the park. They wandered on together, farther and farther from home, both of them self-conscious and embarrassed, until they perceived that the weather was changing, and that it was about to rain. And then—

"The princess observed the breaking clouds, said she was afraid of the storm, and leant on M. de Saint-Pierre's arm as they turned to go back to the château. They walked on in silence until the storm burst on them so furiously that they only just had time to take refuge in a summer-house, protected by a heavy overgrowth of greenery. Presently the rain fell in torrents, and the distant rumblings of the thunder rolled up alarmingly near to them. Frightened and dazed, the princess clung to her lover; her beautiful head rested on his shoulder, and he could feel the beating of her heart. A sensation of voluptuous delight ran through his veins; he felt as if he were about to die of joy. And then her hand pressed his, and her sighs and his were mingled, and a voice full of emotion responded to his vows of love. In a transport of joy he threw himself at her feet, implored her, worshipped her! She nearly fainted in his arms; she was defenceless—with-

out strength, without volition; she abandoned herself like Julie, and he was in a delirium of frenzy like Saint-Preux."

Bernardin, that is to say, had lived (whereas Jean-Jacques had only invented) the story of *La nouvelle Héloïse*, which was also the story of Æneas and Dido; and then, of course, the storm lifted, revealing once again the glittering beauties of the spring; and then—

"How specially ravishing are such scenes for two lovers who have just exchanged their first vows of tenderness! Yet what embarrassment troubles their talk, and what indescribable emotions fill their hearts, now penetrated by that divine life which on earth receives the name of love!"

And how doubly embarrassing, one may add, is the position when the lady is of high, and the lover of low degree, and the world in which they both live is a censorious world, and attaches more importance to equality of rank and fortune than to the communion of kindred souls!

That was what Bernardin and his princess discovered; and their first impulse was bravely to defy the cruel world which forbade them to make each other happy. The princess's mother had heard what had happened, and had intervened, after the way of mothers, and the princess was bathed in tears. "Our beautiful days of happiness are past," she said, "and you must give me courage. If you desert me, I shall die." And Bernardin, of course, protested that he had

no thought of deserting the princess, and that it was absurd that separation should be the sequel of such bliss as they had had. "No, no, Marie," he cried. "We must flee from here and seek another land in which to hide a happiness of which the world is envious." And equally, of course, Marie nearly yielded to persuasion; and—once more equally, of course—when they came to think it over calmly, they had to agree that it was impossible. For Bernardin, after all, had neither a fortune nor a "place"—had only, in fact, a few francs in his pocket, and would be obliged to go borrowing before he could leave the town; and consequently—

"When he had cast his eyes over the stern and pathetic letter, in which a mother, now on the brink of the grave, implored her daughter to spare her last days this pain, and not to hasten the death—a death, alas! that was to come too soon—of her who had borne her in her womb, it seemed to him that he heard the dying appeal which no human being can resist, and he fell into a state of profound and overwhelming grief. A sorrowful silence succeeded to his lamentations. His one thought was that it was his duty to bear the undivided burden of the trouble. So he sacrificed himself to the woman whom he loved, and it was decided that the princess should leave him."

So Marie departed; and Bernardin, on his side, borrowed more money, and collected more letters of introduction, and set out for Vienna to seek his fortune there.

Such is the story—the first half of the story—as

Aimé-Martin tells it. It is an idyll full of Arcadian simplicity and charm, and of those *douces émotions* which the latter half of the eighteenth century loved, so that it seems almost a pity to disturb it with facts and authentic documents. But it is, as it happens, only partly true ; and it is really necessary to set the first half of the story right in order that the second half, even in Aimé-Martin's version, may be intelligible.

CHAPTER IV

Bernardin writes about his love affairs to Duval of St. Petersburg—The Princess dismisses him—He forms desperate resolutions but does not carry them out—Departure from Poland—Arrival at Dresden—His strange adventure there with one who is "fair and fickle as Ninon."

THE Aimé-Martin version of Bernardin's passionate experience is based, too obviously, on *La nouvelle Héloïse.* The biographer is resolved to see in his hero the model "man of sensibility" on whom has fallen the mantle and a double portion of the spirit of Saint-Preux; and he therefore pictures his passion as virtuous and his renunciation as sublime. Bernardin, however, was in correspondence at the time, not only with Hennin the French Resident, but also with Duval the St. Petersburg jeweller; and with the help of his letters to them we can read between the lines of his romance.

It appears, in the first place, that he was not in Poland—"seeing the princess every day and all day long"—for two years as he gave out, but only for a few months; and it also appears that his love had by no means stifled his ambition. He wanted "a job," and was continually appealing to Hennin to find him one. He would be willing, he says, to draw up a report on the fortifications of northern Turkey, or to accept a mission to Palestine or Egypt. And if, meanwhile, he is in love, well love is only an agreeable interlude—the diversion of a man surprised at his good

fortune and not ashamed to boast of it. He boasts of it in his letters to Duval—

"My friend," he writes, "I will hide nothing from you, and therefore I must tell you of an inclination which may almost be described as a passion. It has done me good by curing me of the vapours; so I can assure you that love is a good medicine—especially love that has its way. My experience of it has been so charming that I feel bound to tell you my secret. It may be as useful to you as it has been to me.

"It would be very flattering to my vanity if I could tell you the name of the object of my passion, but my sense of delicacy does not permit me to be vain. Enough that she possesses every quality that could attach me to her—countless graces, a sufficient intelligence, a tenderness which I reciprocate, etc."

And then, in another letter—

"I am not going to tell you the name of the person who holds the first place, next to yourself, in my affections. Her rank is much higher than mine, and though she is not extraordinarily beautiful, her charms and her intelligence well merit the homage which I have paid to them. She has rendered me services which make it unnecessary for me to avail myself of your offers at this moment, and she pressed those services on me so affectionately that I felt bound to give her the preference."

The latter letter—the last sentence of it especially—should be read with care, for it is significant. It

means that Bernardin has no need to borrow money from the jeweller, because he had already borrowed some from the princess.

Here, indeed, and at last, we have a faithful echo of Saint-Preux. Saint-Preux, as we all know, accepted money from Julie ; and the novel in which her insistent generosity is related was the new book of which every one was talking at the time when Bernardin accepted money from Marie. It seems fair to suppose that he had read it, and was living up to it ; though when we come to inquire into Marie's motives for offering the money, we find fact more prosaic than fiction.

She may have used the phrases which *La nouvelle Héloïse* had consecrated : "I insult your honour—when I would give my life for it? I insult your honour—I who have been so near to abandoning my own?" Et cetera, et cetera. But Bernardin, as we have seen, wanted to go away ; and Marie, as the sequel will show, wanted to get rid of him ; and the only way of getting rid of him was to pay his fare to Vienna. She did so—with whatever demonstrations of undying attachment—and he went.

At Vienna, however, he failed for once to fall upon his feet. He had an introduction to a lady—a relative of the Austrian Ambassador to Poland ; but she was elderly, aristocratic, and exclusive. When she learnt that Bernardin was not related to the Marquise de Saint-Pierre, whom she had met in Paris, and had no patent of nobility whatsoever, her interest in him ceased ; and Bernardin, discouraged, made up his mind, at the end of a fortnight, to return to Poland. There at least, he was persuaded, a fond heart waited to welcome him, beating in unison with his own.

But no! The Polish Government, to which he applied for employment, would offer him nothing better than a lieutenant's commission, with the ludicrous stipend of forty ducats a year; and Marie absolutely refused to renew a *liaison* which she considered closed. He saw her, and entreated her; he wrote her appealing letters; but he found her firm and cold. She had done her best to "cure" him, she wrote, and was very sorry not to have succeeded. He would be grateful to her some day; she was only doing her duty, and only thinking of his good. If advice was what he wanted she was quite willing to advise him to the best of her ability; but she spent most of her time with her mother, and had very little leisure for writing. And then, when he lost his temper, and accused her of preferring another's love to his, she lost her temper too—

"Your passions," she wrote, "are fits of madness which I will not put up with any longer. Return to your senses, and think of your condition in life and your duties.

"I am going away to join my mother in the Palatinate of X. . . . I shall not return here until you have gone, and I shall not write to you again until you give me an address in France.

"MARIE MIESNIK."

"It would be impossible," says Aimé-Martin, "to describe the frenzy into which the reading of this letter threw him." He "precipitated himself down the staircase," ran to the princess's palace, and found that she had already gone, and that her boxes were standing in the hall, waiting to be conveyed to her——

"He steps forward and tries to question the servants about the princess's departure. Alas! he is too exhausted by his excitement. He has hardly muttered a few inarticulate words when his blood freezes in his veins and he falls unconscious on the floor. The greatest attention was given to him. He was lifted up and carried home to his apartment, where he fell into a high fever, and delirium made him for several days oblivious of his troubles."

He recovered, however,—we are still following Aimé-Martin—and "did not shrink from the most desperate resolutions" in the hope of seeing Marie again. He would take orders, and become a monk in one of the Polish convents. Marie would come to worship there, and would recognize him in the penitential garb. He would preach a sermon that would make her weep. She would come to him for consolation; he would console her; their twin souls would be "united by virtue." That was one project. Another was to leave the country and return to it as a conquering hero in an invading army; and, as war had just broken out between Poland and Saxony, Bernardin borrowed twelve hundred francs—not from Marie, this time, but from M. Hennin—and travelled by way of Silesia to Dresden.

Such is his story. It begins, in the Aimé-Martin version, like a Gessner idyll, and ends with the red-hot passion of the inimitable Saint-Preux. We need not doubt that it seemed thus idyllic and passionate to Bernardin when he recalled it in his old age, and to his admirers when they sat at his feet and listened to

it; but much of the emotion must have been an embellishment and an after-thought. The sober truth, as the letters indicate it, seems to be that Bernardin made an essay in gallantry, and was snubbed, and suffered in his self-esteem. We are a long way as yet from the intensity of passion which we shall see distinguishing the later Romantics, informing their lives, and directly inspiring their art. Bernardin, after all, was only a beginner, feeling his way tentatively along the passionate path. He did not nurse either his grief or his grievances, though they were to inspire him in the end, but was quite ready for a fresh adventure.

He arrived at Dresden in April 1765—the year in which Jean-Jacques, his master, was preached out of Môtiers by the unconscionable Pastor Montmollin; and the desired adventure was not long in befalling him. M. de Bellegarde, the governor, received him kindly, invited him to dinner, exchanged sentimental confidences with him, and bade him "never despair of fortune," seeing that our sentimental sorrows are often "benefits in disguise." A hard saying, perhaps; for Bernardin was still hoping, and still bombarding Marie with his letters.

Meanwhile, however, Bernardin walked daily in the gardens on the banks of the Elbe; and a young woman of singular and striking beauty walked there too. He was absorbed in his thoughts, and his thoughts were of Marie, but still—— Their eyes met, and the stranger evidently expected Bernardin to speak. He did not speak—his heart was heavy, and he had not yet the courage; but the stranger was impatient. Was it melancholy, she wondered, or only diffidence that held

him back? Whatever the obstacle, she was resolved to overcome it; so she wrote him a letter and sent it to him by her page.

"Quit your grave meditations," ran the missive. "The morning of life is meant for love. Let me crown you with roses and bring you back to pleasure. I am fair and fickle as Ninon, and I know the secret which dispels all trouble. So make haste! Time flies, and love, like a bird, is on the wing."

It was an irresistible invitation, promising much better things than the adoption of the monastic habit, and Bernardin accepted it. A carriage was waiting for him at the garden gate, and he got into it. It drove him to a palace, and there, in the depths of a perfumed boudoir, his unknown beauty awaited him—"her eyes as blue as the heavens and a voluptuous smile upon her lips." She came forward to Bernardin, and placed, as she had promised, a garland of roses on his brow, and told him the secret of happiness as she conceived it—

"Our griefs," she said, "are of our own making; our pleasures come from the gods. We must make haste and seize them before they are snatched away from us. The great rule of happiness is to depend upon nothing and to pass through the world without stopping to think. The teaching of experience is, 'Take pleasures as they come, and do not try to fathom them, for you are created to enjoy, and not to understand.'"

"And with that," continues the biographer, "she

clasped M. de Saint-Pierre in her arms, excited him to transports of delight, and filled his soul with joy;" and he was privileged to remain with her for a week, draining the chalice of pleasure, until of a sudden the enchantress ceased her seductions and became majestically serene.

"Chevalier," she said, "a power stronger than mine compels me to set you free again, and break the charm which binds you to me. But no more moody anxieties! Pursue fresh pleasures. Time flies, and love, like a bird, is on the wing."

That was the end of the interlude; and Bernardin was once more put into the carriage and driven back to his apartment, feeling like a man who had just awakened from a dream. It is the sort of story which one does not readily believe without corroborative evidence; but Bernardin was a man in whose case dreams and fairy tales were often true, and corroborative evidence is forthcoming. The name of the lady who favoured him was known. The lady was the mistress of a Jewish millionaire, indulging a caprice; and the story of the adventure "appears in the correspondence." A letter to Bernardin from M. de Neuf-Germain, dated May 3, 1765, and preserved in the manuscript department of the Havre Public Library, contains this reference to it—

"The adventure which befell you in the course of your journey is indeed a strange one; but I am not in the least surprised at it. One readily believes that such a thing might happen to such an amiable man as you."

So we may take it that it did happen; and it certainly happened at an appropriate moment. Bernardin, as has been stated, was still, at this time, corresponding with his princess; and the tone of the princess's letters was of shocking and unwarrantable acerbity. Knowing nothing of the interlude, she was nevertheless accusing Bernardin of claiming her esteem while he was doing everything that he could to forfeit it. Passions such as his, she said, were "degrading to the courage of a soldier." Courage on the field of battle was nothing: "True courage would consist in overcoming the mad passion which is making you miserable, adopting the means most likely to cure it, seeking some employment suitable to your talents and your condition in life, and leaving the rest to time, instead of abandoning yourself to frenzies unworthy of a man who ought to follow the guidance of reason."

Et cetera. One quotes the letter with malicious pleasure rather than from sympathy for Marie. She is one of the least sympathetic heroines whom one encounters in the annals of romance; and one rejoices to know that Bernardin had already adopted "the means most likely to cure" his passion for her before receiving the communication in which she so scornfully counselled him to do so.

Aimé-Martin, indeed, denies that he was cured. "The infidelity of one's mistress," writes Aimé-Martin, "is no doubt the greatest of misfortunes; but when we are unfaithful ourselves, our last illusion vanishes and we lose the consciousness of virtue which might otherwise be our consolation." That aphorism, however, is too much at variance with the known facts of human

nature to be accepted on Aimé-Martin's authority; and it is quite possible that Aimé-Martin would have been less sententious if Princess Marie Miesnik's last letter had been shown to him. He is on surer ground when he tells us that Bernardin left Dresden, having failed to obtain a commission in the Saxon army, and repaired to Berlin to offer his sword to Frederick the Great.

CHAPTER V

Arrival at Berlin—A third offer of marriage—Bernardin returns to Paris—Receives an appointment in Mauritius—Makes love to the Governor's wife—Consequent coolness in the Governor's manner—Once more in Paris—And in society—Relations with the Neckers—Reads *Paul et Virginie* in Madame Necker's salon—Its chilly reception by the philosophers—Its enthusiastic reception by the general public—Outbreak of the French Revolution—Preferment for Bernardin at last.

THOUGH Bernardin failed to obtain preferment from Frederick the Great, it was at Berlin that he received, or is said to have received, his third offer of marriage—a thing which happened, or is said to have happened, to him almost as a matter of routine.

There was a Herr Taubenheim there—a farmer of the tax on tobacco—whom Bernardin met at a party. "My house is yours," said Herr Taubenheim; and Bernardin stayed in it for several months. "I have a daughter," Herr Taubenheim added a little later. "You had better marry her, live with us, grow cabbages, and cultivate virtue." But Bernardin did not see his way to do so. "My heart," he explained, "is no longer mine to dispose of." The memory, that is to say, of his Polish princess enchained him. He had been able to find relief from the recollection in a passing adventure with a courtesan, but his fancy could not accept the permanent restraints of marriage. "Better to love in vain," etc.

Such is Aimé-Martin's pretty story, but there are

flaws in it. Genealogists have demonstrated that Herr Taubenheim at this date had no daughter, and was not even married. Possibly, then, it was a niece or a sister or a cousin or an aunt whom he offered to Bernardin, or possibly Bernardin confused his sentimental memories when he reviewed them through the mist of years. The fact remains, at any rate, that he went back to Paris still thinking of Marie Miesnik, and that Marie Miesnik continued to write to him in spite of her threat to close the correspondence.

Her letters were not passionate, but sensible. She exhorted him to obtain employment—"any sort of employment provided that it be honest"; and he proceeded to assail the influential with importunate applications, drafting uninvited reports on his travels, and on various topics of the day, forwarding them to the various Secretaries of State, and maintaining that he had thus laid the Government under an obligation which entitled him to expect a well-paid appointment in the service of the Crown. Why, for instance, should he not be commissioned to found a colony somewhere, and to make laws for it?

The proposal was not quite so wildly chimerical as might appear. It was at about this date that Rousseau was invited to draft a Constitution for Corsica; so that the disciple was, in fact, though unwittingly, following in the footsteps of the master. He thought his dream was coming true when he found himself on board a vessel bound for Madagascar with a commission in his pocket. He had spent all his ready money in buying books, and had been obliged to borrow from his patrons in order to buy shirts; and as he was not one of those practical people who ask questions, it

was not until he was at sea that he discovered that the vessel was engaged in the slave trade, and that his own destiny was to land at Mauritius and do odd jobs there as an engineer at a paltry stipend of one hundred louis a year.

He had dreamt, he says, of being a legislator, and he found himself "a master mason." His principal duty was to build a bake-house, and he built it so badly that ("to my intense grief," he says) the roof fell in and killed a negro. Meanwhile, he supplemented his salary by engaging in trade, and, like an honest man, sent money home to France to pay his tailor and bootmaker; and then, at last, he succeeded in so far forgetting his princess that he had—or tried to have—an "affair" with Madame Poivre, the wife of the governor of the island.

The story is not to be found in Aimé-Martin's Life. All that we read there is that Bernardin had a profound admiration for M. Poivre's talents and character; that he learnt from M. Poivre's conversation that he "had sought from passion a happiness which passion is incapable of giving," and would be better occupied in studying natural history; that he presently became aware of a certain coolness in M. Poivre's manner to him; that he asked for explanations, and could not obtain any; and that he consequently decided, as a silent protest, to omit all mention of M. Poivre's name in writing his relation of his adventures in the island. All this is not very credible. One does not need to be a very acute literary detective in order to surmise that something has been left out; and a bundle of letters bequeathed by Bernardin to the Havre Public Library shows

that what has been left out is precisely—Madame Poivre.

Not that she was to blame, or that Bernardin, in this instance, proved irresistible. The exact contrary was the case. It cannot even be proved that Madame Poivre went so far as to flirt with the handsome young engineer. She was as virtuous as Madame Necker herself, and had a greater regard for the appearances and the proprieties. The history of Bernardin's relations with her is simply that he made advances, and was snubbed; that he made further advances, and was snubbed again; that he persisted in his advances, and was snubbed to the end of the chapter. "Please, please, my dear sir, do not write to me so often," she pleads, "I have so much to do . . . I have so little time to read." And so on, and so forth, in reply alike to Bernardin's requests that Madame Poivre will read his manuscripts and tell him what she thinks of them, and to his proposal that he and she shall enrol themselves as Knight and Dame respectively in a new Order of Chivalry, to be entitled the Order of Friendship.

That is all. Bernardin's failure here does not seem to have been cheered, even for a moment, by the illusion of success. The correspondence, however, clears up the mystery of M. Poivre's "coolness," and the adventure seems to have to some extent embittered Bernardin. He wrote of women, when the time came for him to write of them, in such a tone that a woman protested—

"If I were in the mood to dispute with you, I would reproach you for the insincerity with which you

write about women. Do you really suppose—do you really ask me to believe—that they would never think of men if men did not persecute them? If you have always found them cruel, you had better ask my brother the reason. He will tell you that the explanation is that you have gone very clumsily to work with them."

Thus Mademoiselle Girault—the sister of the friend who had lent Bernardin money for his Russian expedition; but the true explanation of his failure is not that he was clumsy—the correspondence indicates, on the contrary, that he was more than ordinarily clever—but that he had tried the arts of seduction on a virtuous woman. There were many such—though one is apt to forget it—even in the eighteenth century; and it was not to their admirers, but to their husbands, that they appeared "more precious than rubies." So, as the story, after all, amounts to nothing, and is only important as showing that Bernardin, though feeling his way to sublime and romantic passions, had not quite broken with the gallantry of his epoch, we will say no more about it.

In 1771, Bernardin was back in Paris—thirty-four years of age, his real life's work not yet begun, and the nature of his career still undecided. He had "seen the cities and read the minds of many men"; he had garnered the experiences which were to make him a great writer; but there were to be thirteen more years of groping and fumbling before he found his way and won success in literature.

He was writing all the time—writing and re-writing

—copying, altering and revising, and occasionally publishing; but his chief object still was to obtain some interesting, and not too laborious, employment in the public service. He besought Cabinet ministers to send him to India or else to America. They knew little of these countries, he said, and they ought to know more of them. America, in particular, in view of the War of Independence, was a country well worth studying. He would keep a diary and send them copies of it at regular intervals; they would not fail to find it full of profitable observations.

That was one of his schemes—one scheme among several. As an alternative he applied for a sinecure in the Department of Finance, appealing to Madame Necker to help him with her influence. It was generally understood, he wrote, that M. Necker had at his disposal "a considerable number of well-paid posts, suitable for men of no particular ability, and leaving them abundant leisure for their own work." He was the very man to shine in such an office. Might not a place be found for him? But that was the wrong tone to take with Necker—a banker accustomed to control subservient clerks, and convinced that financial problems could only be grappled with by men of genius who gave their whole time to them; so that Bernardin was advised to address himself to some other Minister instead. He did so, but without any very satisfactory result. "Gratuities" were sometimes forthcoming; but for "a permanency" he sought in vain.

He knew people, however, and was even to some extent "in society." The years from 1771 to 1778 were the years of his friendship with Rousseau. He also frequented the salon of Mademoiselle de

Lespinasse, where he met, and quarrelled with, Condorcet and d'Alembert. They could perfectly well, so he told Madame Necker, have procured him a pension, and their failure to do so showed how thin was the veneer of their friendship. In Madame Necker's own salon he was a person of sufficient importance to be invited to read his unpublished manuscripts.

Among other manuscripts he read that of *Paul et Virginie* before a company which included Thomas, Buffon, and Abbé Galiani; and—incredible as it may seem—his masterpiece was not appreciated.

"At first the company listened in silence. Then, little by little, their attention began to wander, and they whispered to each other and yawned. M. de Buffon looked at his watch and asked for his carriage. The guests nearest to the door slipped out. Thomas went to sleep. M. Necker smiled to see the ladies weep; and they, ashamed of their tears, dared not admit that they were interested. When the reading was finished, no word of praise was spoken. Madame Necker only criticized the conversation between Paul and the old man . . . comparing it to a glass of iced water. M. de Saint-Pierre withdrew in a state of disencouragement impossible to describe, believing that sentence had been definitely passed on him. The effect of his work on such an audience left him without a gleam of hope."

So Aimé-Martin writes; and it appears, from Bernardin's own manuscript notes, that Madame Necker spoke not of a "glass" but of a "bucket" of

cold water. Yet the fact was that he had already begun to succeed and was on the point of achieving a success beyond his most ambitious expectations. *Paul et Virginie* was to set the coping-stone on the edifice of Bernardin's fame—a fame of which the solid foundation had already been laid by the *Études de la Nature.* It was to be translated into every civilized language, and to be read, and admired, by the highest as well as the lowest in the land—and that without distinction of politics, and whether their sympathies were with the old or with the new *régime.*

The book appeared in 1788—on the very eve, that is to say, of the great period of turmoil and transition. It bridges the gap, in the history of Romanticism, between Rousseau and Chateaubriand, and it united the readers of two generations, brought up in different literary traditions, in a common literary enthusiasm. On the one hand we find Madame de Genlis, the royal governess, taking the royal princes to visit the author in his "hermitage," and Marie-Antoinette adopting his book as the key to the cipher in which she corresponded with her friends abroad. On the other hand we find Joseph Bonaparte making a friend of the author and Napoleon loading him with honours and emoluments.

His work, indeed, opened the door for him to those honourable public positions which he had pursued with such unavailing persistence during the years of struggle. It was recognized, at last, that he was indeed a benefactor of mankind for whom something ought to be done. One of Louis XVI's last official acts, dictated, no doubt, by his Republican advisers, was to

appoint Bernardin as "a worthy successor to Buffon," Keeper of the Zoological Gardens, at a salary of 10,800 francs a year; and he was appointed, a few years later, to be Professor of Republican Morality at a training college for elementary school teachers.

Nor was that all; nor was it only from the Government that Bernardin received his meed of distinguished consideration. He was elected—that was a matter of course—a member of the Academy.[1] Strangers wrote to him by every post—he paid £80 for their letters in a single year—to render homage to his "sensibility"; while the women of France—and not of France only—realizing that he was a bachelor, and not considering him too old at fifty, filled his letter-box, not only with compliments, but also with proposals of marriage.

[1] That is to say of the branch of the Institut de France which took the place of the Academy after the Revolution.

CHAPTER VI

Bernardin receives further offers of marriage—He marries Félicité Didot—She dies and he marries Désirée de la Fite de Pelleporc —The serene happiness of his last years—His wife's loyalty to his memory—Her idealization of his pre-nuptial love affairs.

A CERTAIN number of Bernardin's proposals of marriage were made through parents or guardians, more or less in accordance with the rules.

An Abbé, for instance, wrote to propose on behalf of his niece—"a very amiable young person, as naïve as innocence itself, and as pure as a fine day in spring." She had no fortune, he added, but that did not matter since "you and I and she all put our trust in Providence." A niece was also offered by a Madame Boisguilbert—a niece who was "fat and healthy, and sure to make a good wife." A. M. Aubert, on the other hand, urged the claims of a sister. The lady, he stated, would present herself for inspection in the Zoological Gardens, "wearing a green dress and accompanied by her maid."

Then there were other ladies who took their courage in both hands and spoke for themselves—a Mademoiselle Keralio, for example—

"Until I know where I stand" (wrote Mademoiselle de Keralio), "I will do my very best to keep within the limits of simple friendship a sentiment which would readily change its name and character if

circumstances permitted. If you love me you must respect me; the more I revere your genius, the more anxious I feel for your respect. I know that I could make you happy; and you, on your part, know that I prefer the creator of the beautiful Virginie to all other men in the world. Be patient, then, and wait for the good things which divine Providence has in store for us. I do not know whether it is my destiny to have you for my husband or not; but I do not mean any man to boast that he is merely my lover."

Decidedly Mademoiselle de Keralio was bold; but the palm for courage might be disputed with her by an anonymous admirer who wrote from Lausanne. She was young, she said, and she was also beautiful and rich, and she was writing with the approval of her mother. She would like to marry Bernardin—on one condition—that he changed his religion and became a Protestant.

"I want," she continued, "a husband who will love me always and love no one else. But he must believe in God and worship Him in the same fashion as myself. My sole desire in becoming your wife will be that we should work out our salvation together."

Another correspondent, who also wrote from Lausanne, was Rosalie de Constant, the cousin and counsellor of the more celebrated Benjamin Constant. She was a clever girl, but deformed—a hunchback, with a sharp tongue and a sentimental soul. She seems to have cherished hopes, and Bernardin seems to have given her some reason to cherish them. He

told her, in one of his letters, that he regarded her as "a gift from Providence bestowed upon me as the reward of my labours." But he also asked for information as to her age, her appearance, and her "fortune"; and Rosalie had to admit that she was poor and that she was not pretty.

Bernardin was quite nice about that—as nice as he knew how to be. He compared Rosalie's letters to "bunches of flowers," and also to "baskets of fruit"; but when she proposed to come to Paris to see him, he discouraged the idea. It would be "too great a risk," he pointed out, unless they were quite sure that they would suit each other; and Rosalie, like the good and modest and sensible girl that she was, did not force herself upon him, but contented herself with making an entry in her confidential diary—

"On March 2, 1791, I wrote for the first time to S.-P. It was a thoughtless act, the outcome of melancholy and enthusiasm. On March 27, 1793, he wrote, for the last time, to me. It is all over now. Farewell my hopes, and my flattering dream of friendship and sympathy. It is a dried flower which cannot be revived or made to yield fruit, though its fragrance is still pleasant. What is life but a moment of the Eternal Day in which Time envelops us!"

And also—the reflection following a recipe for a new kind of cake—

"Better not to try to see the author whose works have enchanted you. Reflect, rather, that what you

already know of him is the best that there is to be known."

That was all—though the correspondence was afterwards renewed in a more "Platonic" tone; and we are left uncertain whether the upshot of the incident was to break Rosalie's heart, or only to hurt her pride. A few years later she received, and declined, an offer of marriage from the *émigré* General de Montesquiou.[1] It may have been for Bernardin's sake that she rejected him; but she did not give that reason, and we have no right to give it for her. All that she said, to Madame de Montolieu, the novelist, who acted as intermediary, was that she was not in love with General de Montesquiou, who was a widower, and that she did not like the idea of becoming a step-mother, and that therefore, considering all things, she would do better not to marry him.

And Bernardin meanwhile—one does not quite know why—had married Félicité Didot.

He had passed the age of violent passions—he was fifty-six; and in his correspondence with strange admirers, he had always comported himself as the wariest of wary bachelors, advancing cautiously and then retiring with precipitation, "like a bear," says one of his biographers, "that had thrust its paw unawares into a wasps' nest." He had treated many ladies very much as he had treated Rosalie, "letting I dare not wait upon I would," and flying from risks as soon as he perceived their perils. But Félicité—well, Félicité had certain advantages in the competition.

[1] A Republican general with royalist inclinations. He conquered Savoy for the Republic; but was accused, and fled to Switzerland to save himself. He was a man of culture, and an Academician.

She was Bernardin's publisher's daughter ; she was pretty and had a dowry. Bernardin met her in the shop when he called to inquire about his sales, and found her "pushing" *Paul et Virginie* with personal rather than professional enthusiasm. He gave her a rose—it was really the least that he could do—and they began to correspond ; and when the Revolution drove Félicité and her family into the country for safety, the correspondence reached a crisis. Félicité confided to Bernardin that he was "next to God" in her thoughts. She did not know, she said, what would become of her now that she was separated from him. He was "so good, so sympathetic." She needed his "presence" and his "sage reflections." He was her "favourite star"—would he not come to her? And he need not —this in a postscript—be afraid of his letters falling into her mother's hands, and express himself coldly, with that fear before his eyes. Her mother is in her confidence : "She knows very well that I am in love with you."

So Félicité loved, and Bernardin let himself be loved. She was a good girl, and docile, albeit a little forward, submissive to criticism, and willing to accept even humiliating conditions. She spelt badly and dressed loudly—the criticism chiefly bears upon these points. Bernardin complained of everything, from the colour of her boots to the way in which she did her hair. Evidently she was very much "endimanchée" when she walked out with him—a shop-girl, with a taste for the gaudy, unsuccessfully aping her betters. That may have been the reason why Bernardin first proposed a secret marriage, and then, yielding on that point to the objections raised, made it clear to Félicité

that she must not expect to be the partner of his grandeur, but must be satisfied to live in the condition of a housekeeper privileged to be also his mistress, growing vegetables for him in the country while he pursued his fame in Paris.

That was the programme. Félicité accepted it, and it was carried out almost to the letter. We have a bundle of Bernardin's letters to her, and they are mostly concerned with his vegetables and his underclothing. It was not a romantic state of things; but, as it did not last long, we need not dwell on it. Félicité, it is evident, was resigned rather than happy. She complains, in her letters, that she does not see enough of her husband, but always in the humble language of one who dares not assert her rights, and indeed is hardly conscious of possessing any. She looks up to him as a great man who deserves "a much better wife" than she can contrive to be.

She bore him two children, named appropriately Virginie and Paul, and then she fell into consumption, and pined away, and died. Bernardin's enemies said that he "made her unhappy"; but there is no specific charge. It is as impossible for some men to make some women happy—and for some women to make some men happy—as it is for them to lift heavy weights, or dance on the tight-rope, or perform on the flying trapeze; and when an elderly man of letters marries a bold young woman whose head-gear arouses the derision of the elegant, it is too much to expect that a full and enduring sympathy will subsist between them. Bernardin, at any rate, did not attain to such sympathy, and did not achieve happiness in marriage until he married a second time.

Rosalie de Constant, who still wrote to him at rare intervals, counselled him to remain a widower. "For the children's sake," she said. "Only your heart can take their mother's place." But perhaps Rosalie did not mean what she said; and in any event her advice arrived too late, for Bernardin was already, and very seriously, in love.

It had come about through his being invited to distribute the prizes at Madame de Maisonneuve's Academy for Young Ladies, and to look over the essays and exercises of the elder pupils; and he may well have seemed an ideal man for the performance of such functions—so benevolent, so sympathetic, of so noble a presence and such a safe antiquity. There could be no possible danger, one pictures Madame de Maisonneuve reasoning, that any of the young ladies would be foolish and flighty with him.

Yet danger there was—if danger be the proper word—for one of them; and a close bond of sympathy declared itself, almost from the first day, between the silvery-haired preceptor, now aged sixty-three, and Mlle. Désirée de la Fite de Pelleporc, aged only twenty. She had just passed through one of those "grand passions" which are, as it were, the *apéritifs* or *hors d'œuvres* of the feast of love; and the tutor, leaning over her shoulder, and listening to her hints and confessions, was exhorting her to tell him all about it. She need not be shy, he said. Let her put her story on paper, using assumed names, as a sort of literary exercise. There could be nothing compromising in that; and perhaps his experience of life might be helpful to her.

She thought that it might be; she did as she was

told; and presently the grand passion was forgotten, and a new love had taken its place.

There was no question, this time, of Bernardin's allowing himself to be loved. He was taking the initiative and pleading, with the dignity of age, indeed, but also with the vehemence of youth—a little jealous of the hero of Désirée's girlish dreams, but full of confidence in the power of love to bridge the gulf between the autumn and the spring. "The young honeysuckle," he wrote, "adorns the trunk of the old oak, and the tree in its turn protects the flowers from the tempest"; and he spoke of his children, and their need for a mother's care, and asked Désirée to picture Paul and Virginie on her knees and the father of Paul and Virginie at her feet.

She was moved by his eloquence, and married him; and they were happy; and, whereas one can only think of Félicité as having been a good enough girl in her way and according to her lights, one has to say of Désirée that she was "as good as gold."

We need have no scruple about prying into her secrets, for they were happy secrets, and it was her wish that we should know them. She kept her love letters—both those which she wrote and those which she received—and bequeathed them to the Havre Public Library for the edification of the world. They are delightful. We do not find Bernardin writing to his second wife, as he wrote to his first, about beetroots and cucumbers, and socks and night-shirts, and garden tools and new potatoes. She is his "Dulcinea," his "Eurydice," his "dear angel," his "little month of May." And if she, on her part, writes, that she is "sad" and "bored," and that "the time passes

slowly" when he is away from her, she has the consoling thought, denied, as we have seen, to Félicité, that he is as eager as she can be for the day of his return.

So she loved him as a mistress, though she had also had to care for him as a nurse. His last years, thanks to her, were those of a happy man who basked in continual sunshine; and when death took him from her, she treasured his memory, and loved and worshipped it.

She married again, indeed—she was young enough to have the right to do so; but her second marriage did not, even in thought, imply any infidelity to the first. Her second husband was Aimé-Martin—a devoted disciple if ever there was one; and she and Aimé-Martin sat down together to write that Life of Bernardin from which so many quotations have been taken for this narrative.

It is a Life which it has been necessary to criticize, and even to contradict, in passing. It has been found to contain a good many statements not in strict accordance with the facts. But its very faults and inexactitudes are proofs of the loyalty of the biographers. Bernardin was, for both of them, a man beyond cavil—a man whose fame must be kept spotless.

Aimé-Martin might have been expected to be jealous of the memory; but if he was, he did not show it, and Madame Aimé-Martin was just as little jealous of the portion of Bernardin's life which had not belonged to her. She knew well enough that the romantic preceptor who had singled her out for his attentions in Madame de Maisonneuve's Academy for

Young Ladies, was a veteran who had profited by many experiences and passed through many adventures; and she would not have had it otherwise. She was interested in those adventures, and she was proud of them. She was proud that the man who had ended by loving her had begun by being loved by a princess. She was even proud that he had been the recipient of the special favours of a fashionable courtesan; and she saw to it that both these stories were told in such a way that their hero issued from them with a halo of romantic glory round his head.

CHAPTER VII

Relation of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre to the Romantics—The intervening generation—The note of ennui—How sounded in the writings of Madame de Staël—Of Benjamin Constant—Of Chateaubriand—Of Sénancour — Differences between them and the Romantics properly so called—The position of Lamartine.

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre lived until 1814. He died, that is to say, when the Romantics strictly so called—the men and women who consciously co-operated in creating a new order of literary things—were children. Alfred de Vigny, the oldest of them, was seventeen; Théophile Gautier, the youngest, was three. Balzac was fifteen; Victor Hugo was twelve; Prosper Mérimée was eleven; George Sand was ten; Alfred de Musset was four. Bernardin's influence on them, therefore, in so far as he had any, was indirect, having filtered through an intervening generation.

The great names in that intervening generation were those of Chateaubriand, Benjamin Constant, Madame de Staël and Sénancour. They were all about thirty years younger than Bernardin—all of them just grown up, or just growing up, when *Paul et Virginie* appeared. Any of them may have known him; most of them probably did so. Chateaubriand, as he tells us, made his acquaintance, on the occasion

of his own election to the Academy in 1811. Madame de Staël may be presumed to have been included in his audience when he read *Paul et Virginie* to Madame Necker and her guests. Sénancour had at least corresponded with him, writing from his exile in the Canton of Fribourg, in Switzerland, to ask whether Bernardin could direct him to any distant island within the borders of which he could possess his soul in peace, and live on the fruits of the earth, by the side of running water, beneath the grateful shadow of a palm.

All of these writers, we may take it, with the possible exception of Benjamin Constant, owed something to Bernardin; and some of them owed a good deal to him. Chateaubriand, in particular, though he disparages him in the *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*, writing that he had "no intelligence," and that "his character was on a level with his intelligence," would never have written *Atala* quite as he wrote it, if it had not been for *Paul et Virginie*, published when he was a young officer who had just mastered the "goose-step" and contributed a poem or two to the *Almanach des Muses*. But they all, at the same time, possessed qualities which he did not possess, and looked at life from a point of view which was not his. Bernardin belonged to the eighteenth century, and they to the nineteenth. Carlyle called *Paul et Virginie* the "swan song" of old dying France; so that between its author and his successors there lay that French Revolution which had played such riotous havoc with old habits, and old ways of thinking.

Bernardin was nearly sixty when the revolutionary tempest burst—too old a man to be much upset by it, provided that it left his head upon his shoulders.

ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE

[*To face p.* 54

Paying little attention to the turmoil, he went on with his work as before—an incorrigibly sentimental optimist at the end of it as at the beginning; but that, to his juniors, was impossible. The storm broke about their heads in the impressionable years, scattering them and driving them into exile. They were cut loose, morally as well as physically, from their moorings, and sent adrift on a strange sea. Their individual lives were of necessity more to them than the collective life. Nothing was a matter of course to them, and every experience was intense and poignant.

The most interesting of their stories have been told in *Madame de Staël and her Lovers*, and *Chateaubriand and his Court of Women;* and about Sénancour there is no very pertinent story to tell. He fled from the stress of the Terror to Switzerland, and lived the contemplative life there, and found no satisfaction in it—largely, it may be, because he married an unsympathetic wife, who regarded him as a mooning idiot. That is all that there is to be said except that he, like the others, took this new view of life as a baffling problem which every man must solve, or fail to solve, for himself—a complicated affair of perplexing forces and emotions, exceedingly difficult, as Benjamin Constant put it, to "arrange." One ranks him with the others, widely as he differed from some of them, for that reason.

"Ennui" is the note which is common to him and to all of them: the recurring word—the "leit motiv" of their lives, their letters, and their contributions to literature. Their works may be read as so many essays on "Ennui"—relations of their various experiences of it, and of their several attempts to escape

from it. On that point each of them has a theory, though not a theory which is either very comforting or very firmly held. We may pause and review their theories in their order.

"How terrible is ennui!" Madame de Staël seems to say. "It has pursued me all over the continent of Europe. The escape from it would be to find happiness in love—in marriage, if possible, but in love in any case; but men are deceivers, and therefore love is deceptive, and, as for fame, it is only, in a woman's case, a splendid mourning for happiness."

"Yes, ennui is indeed the danger," Benjamin Constant seems to echo, "and love might be the escape if it were not for the obligation of perpetually loving the same woman. That is impossible, and it is unreasonable of women to expect it. A man tires of a woman as a child tires of its toys. Ennui returns, like Nature expelled with a fork; and then there is no way of escape, except in the excitement of politics, or at the gaming table."

"Ennui," we seem to hear Chateaubriand repeating, "is the common lot of all superior minds. Its shadow, thrown upon them in the cradle, never lifts. Disillusion, in their case, precedes enjoyment and prevents it. Their comfort, if there be any comfort possible for them, is in religion. Religion—the Catholic religion—when all is said, is very beautiful; and perhaps, if one does not take it too seriously—if one preaches instead of practising, and contemplates dogmas and mysteries without troubling overmuch about codes of conduct—

well, then, perhaps,—but even so one dares not be too sure."

And finally there is Sénancour, first dreaming, as we have seen, that the escape from ennui may be found in the tropical languors of some far-away island, and then realizing that his dream is of unsubstantial fabric. "Nature," he concludes, "forbids us to find any haven of shelter from the universal shipwreck;" and his last aspiration—the aspiration engraved upon his tombstone—is: "Eternity, be thou my refuge!"

Putting it all together, we seem to be listening to the wail of a disappointed generation; and we note that the Romantic Movement begins not in poetry but in prose—not in enthusiasm but in melancholy. It begins, that is to say, with writers compelled to be personal by the sudden shock—the sudden disappearance of old landmarks—and to think everything out afresh for themselves. They are infinitely more personal, just as they are infinitely more melancholy, than Bernardin; and their work, on that account, is infinitely more vital than his.

With them, however, we are still only in the period of pioneers and predecessors. In the main they wrote for themselves, and not with any thought of recasting literary principles. Chateaubriand, indeed, fully grasped the fact that his literary methods had revealed fresh beauties in the French language; but there was no Movement as yet, because there was no conscious collaboration towards a common end. That was to come presently, in the late twenties, and the early thirties, when the strain and stress of life were less intense, and

new men grew up to whom the new order of things presented nothing strange or shocking.

These young men—for they were all quite young—discovered each other and combined; pulling together, as has been said, like the crew of a University eight, with Victor Hugo for their stroke, and Sainte-Beuve, that admirable critic, for their coxswain. Dumas the Elder, Balzac, Prosper Mérimée, George Sand, Alfred de Musset, Alfred de Vigny were the other most prominent members of the crew. They knew what they were doing—or at any rate they knew what they wanted to do. They had a livelier literary conscience than the writers of the Empire; they did not merely set up new literary canons, but conducted a frontal attack upon the old ones.

They did not, of course, work harmoniously or collectively for very long—that never happens in any literary movement. They differed among themselves in temperament as well as in talent. Their individualities and ambitions clashed; there were coolnesses and quarrels; they diverged and went their several ways—Victor Hugo to exile, Mérimée to Court, George Sand to the country, Dumas to Bohemia, Alfred de Vigny to his "ivory tower." But, for a season—for a few years—they were brethren who dwelt together in unity, with their special organs in the press in which they could sing each other's praises, and their *cénacles*, or literary salons, in which they denounced the common enemy and admired each other's compositions.

We shall come to that presently—to the brief golden age in which Victor Hugo stepped out daily, at a fixed hour, on to the balcony, attended by a retinue of minor poets, to show himself to an enthusiastic

populace; but there is one more intervening stage which must be covered first. Just as the Romantic Movement began in prose, not with the Romantics, but with Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, and Chateaubriand and his contemporaries, so it began in verse, not with the Romantics, but with Lamartine.

Occasionally, and by some of the critics, Lamartine is reckoned as one of the Romantics; but his place, like Chateaubriand's, is really with their literary ancestors, models, and examples.

Born in 1790, he was appreciably older than the eldest of them—seven years older than Alfred de Vigny, and twenty years older than Alfred de Musset. His great poetical work—the inspiration of it at all events—dates from 1816, when Vigny was only nineteen, and Musset was only six. Moreover, though he gave the Movement much of its impetus, he rather sympathized with it, and patronized it, than took part in it. He was, if not too fine a gentleman to join in the rough-and-tumble of the fight, at least too stately and magnificent a figure, a man for whom life held too many other interests.

We may describe him, if we like, as an amateur among professionals. Perhaps he had something of the amateur's feeling that poetry was the poet's own concern and that literature in the abstract might take care of itself. His ambition was loftier, as it seemed to him, than that of a mere writer of books. He aspired to be a dignified and majestic man of action, —a statesman or a diplomatist; and destiny, in fact, held glory, albeit only a fleeting glory, of this kind in store for him. Hence, we may imagine, a certain aloofness in his relations with "confrères" who fussed

and fumed about the technicalities of versification. And yet, though he stood apart from them, in all essentials he was one of them.

Like them, he struck the personal note, not by accident, but with a full knowledge of what he was doing. Like them, he cultivated his personality with religious care, resolved that his life should be, or should seem to have been, an effective theatrical performance, —conscious of himself as the child, in the literary sense, of Chateaubriand, and the grandchild of Rousseau, and determined, while imitating, to excel, or seem to have excelled, his literary parents. And finally, like the Romantics—and more than some of them—he took, and knew that he took, his best inspirations from his most intimate experiences.

Notably he did so in those *Méditations poétiques*, —the volume in which French poetry first became really "modern"; so that the true immediate prelude to the Romantic Movement is the story of Lamartine and her whom he has immortalized for us as "Elvire."

CHAPTER VIII

Lamartine's early training—His first love affair—Sent to Italy to get over it—Forgets Mademoiselle P—— and falls in love with Graziella the cigarette-maker—A love which could lead to nothing—A night on the island of Procida—Lamartine's furtive departure—Graziella's death—Lamartine's grief for her.

LAMARTINE was born at Mâcon, an only son, with five sisters, in an old family sufficiently royalist to stand aside and sulk during the Empire, waiting for better times.

There was nothing "romantic" or otherwise exceptional about his education and early training as there had been in the cases of Rousseau and Chateaubriand. He went to school like other boys of his rank, learning the same lessons, playing the same games, reading the same books. His heart went out to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre; but the really influential influences were those of Rousseau, whose *Confessions* he read surreptitiously, and Chateaubriand. He learnt from them, not only the secret of French prose, but also the cult of his personality; a cult in which his mother, though she did not approve of his reading the *Confessions*, confirmed him. "My mother taught me," he says, "never to laugh at myself, but always to remember that I was the handiwork of God."

That was, of all his lessons, the one which he had least difficulty in learning. He took himself so

seriously that, in later years, Chateaubriand himself laughed at him and called him "grand dadais" in Madame Récamier's drawing-room; but, in the meantime, he approached life as an imitator both of Chateaubriand and of Rousseau, an imitator conscious that a high standard had been set, but equally conscious of his own ability to improve upon it. He must be, he felt—and when he came to write of himself he must show that he had been—as interesting as they were, of a similar "sensibility" but of superior moral pretensions. Rousseau, he reminds us, was "obscene," and Chateaubriand was a voluptuary; but Lamartine was neither.

As a first illustration of his "sensibility" he tells a story of his school-days. The favourite sport of his companions, he discovered, was a very barbarous game. A blindfolded boy, armed with a sabre, was set to decapitate a tethered goose: a very ancient French amusement denounced in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's burning pages. Lamartine and one of his small friends took Bernardin's view of it, and protested in a very practical manner. They contrived that the sabre should slash the usher instead of the goose, and then they ran away to their homes, and insisted upon being removed to another school.

That is the only story of Lamartine's school-days, however, on which it seems worth while to dwell; and there is equally little to be said about his life for the first year or two after his leaving school. He read, and wrote, competing for some of the prizes offered by various provincial literary Academies, at Besançon, at Avignon, and at Toulouse. He also had some love

affairs—his mother talks of his "getting into mischief"—but they amounted to very little. He tells a friend of an adventure with a lady in a box at the Mâcon theatre; but he "got no farther than kissing her and went home alone." On the whole he found the ladies of Mâcon disappointing—"forward, impudent coquettes, ignorant, imbecile, and ugly." Not one of them seemed "worthy of passion." "I fear," he writes, "that I have formed such an ideal of perfection that I shall never find what I want; in which case I shall remain a bachelor."

That at the ripe age of twenty-one! One is not in the least surprised to find him, a few weeks later, deeply in love, and eager to get married at once.

There was a Mademoiselle P—— (there is nothing to be gained by trying to pierce the mystery of the initial) whom Lamartine met at a ball and made conspicuous by his attentions. There came a day when he was alone with her in a conservatory; and her mother entered, just as she was blushing and dissolving into his arms. He could only murmur that his intentions were honourable, and so no doubt they were; but Madame Lamartine would afford him no facilities for carrying them out. She "admitted that Mademoiselle P—— was charming"; but she also objected to early marriages, and long engagements, and seized the first opportunity of packing her precocious son off to Italy.

Probably, since these things happened in 1811, she had also another motive for doing so—a desire to get her son, who was tall and well set-up, safely out of the way of the conscription. As a royalist, she would not allow him to serve the Emperor even as an officer; still

less could she endure the thought of his doing so as a private in a marching regiment. One of her cousins, as it happened, was about to go to Leghorn on business. Alphonse might just as well go too. Italy would be sure to delight him. In Italy he would meet no recruiting sergeant, and would cease to remember Mademoiselle P——'s dangerous fascinations.

And so it happened, though it was not Italy, but a beautiful Italian, who blurred Lamartine's recollection of his first love. The story of the sojourn in Italy is the story of *Graziella.*

Graziella, of course, was published as a romance ; but Lamartine never imagined or invented romances. He lived them, and then wrote them out. Graziella was the girl's real name. Her family still live near Naples. One of them—a curé—was recently interviewed about her by a contributor to one of the Italian magazines. "Graziella?" he said. "Ah, yes, she was my aunt. Her mother had a lodger—a Frenchman—a M. Lam—Lam—yes, I think it was, as you say, Lamartine." And Lamartine himself says expressly in his *Mémoires* that the story, save for one or two trivial details, was true. He had gratified his vanity by describing Graziella as a coral-polisher, whereas, in point of vulgar fact, she was a cigarette-maker ; but the rest of the narrative was faithful.

It is a simple story, and would even have been commonplace if it had happened to, or been told by, any one but Lamartine.

He had left his cousin at Leghorn and gone on alone to Rome, and thence to Naples, where his old school-fellow and most intimate friend, Aymon de

Virieu had joined him. He had written, but a little while before, to another friend, Guichard, to say that he would never be able to forget Mademoiselle P——. Italy might distract him, he said, but his trouble was one for which the world contained no remedy. "Even the lapse of time," he vowed, "can do no more than make the pain a little easier to bear. It cannot heal the wound." But now he could hear with equanimity that Mademoiselle P—— was about to be married to another; and he and Aymon de Virieu were dreaming love's young dream in Naples with the two young cigarette-makers, Graziella and Antoniella.

It is the most ordinary, surely, of all the experiences alike of hot-blooded and of sentimental youth; and it is also one of the most ordinary situations in sentimental fiction; and we all know how the poets and the sentimental novelists resolve it. Love levels ranks. King Cophetua vows that the beggar maid shall be his bride. The Lord of Burleigh reveals to the village maiden that he is the lord of many lands and promises that whatever is his shall henceforth be hers as well.

In real life, as we all also know, things work out rather differently. The marriage, if it comes to a marriage, is a disappointingly prosaic business—as even the Lord of Burleigh[1] found it; and the wise

[1] "The Marquis had thought his wife admirable, so long as she was the chief beauty of her village, but when transported to another environment she lost her confidence and her simple grace; affected and ill at ease, she became awkward and ridiculous, nor did she preserve that fresh beauty which might have condoned her faults. . . . Lord Exeter was vexed, and irritation was followed by annoyance, regret and embarrassment. He no longer wished her to accompany him into society, and neglected her. . . . So true is it that one

recognize, even in their hours of weakness, that marriage is out of thé question, and, after toying with the danger, look for a means of evading it. Only that is, as people say, to " behave badly " ; and it is difficult to behave badly and yet, at the same time, to preserve the appearances of elevated sentiment. Yet Lamartine, taking himself so seriously that he never presumed to laugh at himself, was able to achieve the feat.

He was wise—quite as wise as any young man of twenty should be asked to be. He was ambitious, and attentive to every premonition of his coming glory. He never persuaded himself that that glory could be shared by a Neapolitan cigarette-maker, or even by a Neapolitan coral-polisher. He never, that is to say, dreamed of marrying Graziella, but foresaw the end of his romance almost from the beginning of it. He merely span it out, making it last as long as he could, because it was pleasant while it lasted, and then behaved pretty much like any other lover who loves and rides away—save that, though he left Graziella heart-broken, he also left her innocent. That is the plain prose of the matter ; but Lamartine has made of it an idyll over which many tears of sensibility have been shed.

Of his own sensibility in the adventure we have a proof on the occasion of a temporary parting. He had been to see Vesuvius, and Graziella, meanwhile, had removed with her family from Naples to the little island of Procida. On his return, a small boy brought him a letter in badly-spelt Italian ; the gist of it being

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cannot defy the laws and customs which society imposes upon the various classes which compose it without paying the penalty."—*Mme. de Boigne.*

that Graziella feared that she would never see him again. "I went to my room," writes Lamartine, "and threw myself on my bed, and began to weep." But Virieu came in, and found him crying, and asked what it was all about, and cheered him with hopeful remarks. *Tiens, dit-il, un roman qui commence ; il faut le mener à bonne fin !*

That was the difference between his friend's point of view and his. Aymon was, at about this time, summoned home ; and he and his cigarette-maker kissed and parted without, so far as one can gather, any more poignant reflection than that they were now so many kisses to the good. But Lamartine, being freer, pursued his romance, as he was counselled to do, following Graziella to Naples and lodging with her family, first in Procida, and afterwards in the poorer quarters of Naples. He helped her to polish her coral—or perhaps it was to roll her cigarettes ; and he read *Paul et Virginie* to her ; and he dallied, letting the knot tie itself, and leaving the untying of it to Providence.

It might have been, of course—one almost wonders that it was not—cut by some jealous rival Italian's knife. There was a rival—a certain Cecco—as a matter of course ; but Cecco was a modest and retiring man—as ill-favoured as he was unassuming. He "knew his place" and tacitly admitted the noble stranger's prior claims. "I verily believe," says Lamartine, "that he would have been willing, in order to win a smile from Graziella, to follow me to France, and fetch me back to her who preferred me to him."

From him, then, as long as he was left to himself,

there was no danger. But Cecco's father had made up his mind that Cécco must marry Graziella, and Graziella's father had made up his mind that she must marry Cecco. They put their heads together, ignoring Lamartine, and made their arrangements for the betrothal. Lamartine, for them, was only the benevolent friend of the family who would rejoice with them at the happy consummation of their plans. They did not understand, when he left them, to climb Vesuvius, that he was braving peril to obtain distraction from his grief; and they were as little able to conjecture the reason why Graziella pined and fretted. But Lamartine knew, for Graziella told him.

She sat for hours by the sea, gazing out over the waters, and he asked her what vision she saw—

"I see France," she said, "on the other side of the snow-clad mountains."

"And what do you see in France that you find so beautiful?" I asked her.

"I see some one who walks," she answered. "He is like you, and he walks, and walks, and walks, on a long white road which has no end. He walks straight on, straight on, without ever turning round. I wait for hours and hours, hoping to see him turn and come back. But he does not turn. He still walks on and on."

The crisis was nearing when Graziella talked like that. It approached still closer when Graziella discarded her national costume and, with the help of a dressmaker friend, attired herself in what she understood to be the latest Parisian fashion. Lamartine

was not in the least in the dark as to her motives. "She had hoped," he says, "to make herself more worthy of me." Instead of declaring his love, he talked to her playfully, and laughed at her; and the next thing that happened was that Graziella disappeared from her home to the consternation of her family and her betrothed.

While the others were wondering, Lamartine guessed where she had gone and followed her. She had run back to the empty cottage on the island of Procida, meaning to get her to a nunnery on the morrow; and he found her in the cottage, and spent the night alone with her.

"Alas!" he says. "It was not real love on my part, but only the shadow of love. Only I was so young and confiding that I could not but deceive myself. I believed that I adored her as her innocence, her beauty, and her passion merited; and I told her so . . . and she believed me because she needed the belief that she might live, and because her own soul contained passion enough to compensate for the lack of it in a thousand other hearts."

So the night passed, and was consecrated to the "confidences of two lovers who wished that it might last for ever, so that nothing irrelevant might ever come between their lips and hearts." But if it was a night of love, it was also a night of purity and innocence. "Her piety and my shy reserve and the tenderness of our affection for each other protected us from danger." . . . "The tender and the voluptuous are as the poles apart, and the abuse of such an intimacy would have been an act of profanation."

And that was all—or at any rate the end was very near. Graziella allowed herself to be taken home, and things, for a little while, went on pretty much as before. But not for long. What Graziella expected one can only guess; but what happened was, no doubt, inevitable. The lover had hardly declared his love—which was not "real love," as he explains—when he discovered that it was time for him to ride away. Aymon de Virieu came for him with an urgent message from his mother. He must return to France at once. The horses were ordered for midnight, and it was now eleven, so that he would only just have time to pack.

He packed, without telling any one what he was doing. His purpose, it seems, was to slink away, avoiding the passionate pain of parting. He wrote a farewell letter which he intended to push silently under Graziella's door. He said in it that he was only going away for a little while and would soon be back again. He assures us that he meant what he said—which is as it may be; but just as he was about to take his departure, Graziella, whom the noise had disturbed, opened her door and came out into the passage—

"The full moon was shining on the terrace. The poor child recognized my friend. She saw the porter who was shouldering my bag. She reached out her arms to me, uttered a cry of terror, and then fainted and fell unconscious on the ground."

So Graziella was lifted up and carried back to her bed, and Lamartine got into the carriage and drove off, "rolling in the silence of the night along the road to Rome"; and there is nothing more to be said except that he heard presently that Graziella had died for

love of him. "The doctor tells me," she wrote, "that I shall die in three days' time, but if you were with me I would live. It is the will of God. . . . I am bequeathing you my hair, which I have had cut off for you."

Consumption, doubtless—that white pestilence which mowed down so many of the young in those early years of the nineteenth century. It was the disease, and not the love of Lamartine, that was "fatal." Yet he must have been tempted to think of himself, as Chateaubriand did, as the fatal lover whose love blighted, and through whose life there had passed a "funeral procession" of women who had been dear to him. Another love presently—but we shall come to that; and meanwhile we see him, quite oblivious of all the criticisms which might be passed on his behaviour, shedding the farewell tear of sensibility over Graziella's memory—

"Poor Graziella! Since those days, many days have passed. I have loved, and I have been loved, again. Other rays of beauty and tenderness have illuminated my sombre path through life. Other souls have been opened to me, and have revealed in the hearts of women the mysterious treasures of beauty, holiness, and purity which God has placed on earth in order to make us understand, foresee, and long for heaven. But nothing has tarnished your first appearance in my heart. . . . There remains, in the depths of my heart, a tear, which oozes drop by drop, and falls secretly on your memory, refreshing and embalming it in my mind."

CHAPTER IX

The first Restoration—Lamartine in the Guards—His Odyssey during the Hundred Days—At Saint-Cergues—At the Château de Vincy—At Narnier—Dalliance with the boatman's daughter—Returns to France—Resumes but soon resigns his commission—Life at Mâcon—The *Maladie du Siècle*—Sent to Aix-les-Bains to cure it—"Elvire"—"Elvire's" real name.

LAMARTINE'S Neapolitan adventure was followed, after a brief interval, by his Odyssey. After Rousseau, and after Chateaubriand, an Odyssey was essential to the complete romantic life; and Lamartine's opportunity came during the Hundred Days.

Louis XVIII had given him a commission in the Guards, comparing himself—so Lamartine tells us—to Augustus discovering and distinguishing Virgil. He was stationed at Beauvais, where he "resisted the advances" of the waitress in the café, and "completed the studies which were one day to make me famous." He read Fénelon and Bossuet; he went out alone, every afternoon, into the woods and wept for Graziella, "recalling her gracious image" until four p.m.; but as soon as he heard the strokes of the cathedral clock, he returned to drill and duty. He was very vain, he says, of his uniform, and of his "material elegance," and very eager to exhibit himself "to the young women who knew me at home."

Then came the news of the Emperor's escape from Elba, quickly followed by the King's flight to Ghent.

"Elvire"

[*To face p.* 72

Chateaubriand, it will be remembered, attended him there, and became Minister of the Interior *in partibus*. Lamartine was with the troops who escorted him to the frontier and were there disbanded. He changed into mufti and went back to Mâcon ; and there it was decided that, as he did not wish to be pressed into the service of Napoleon, he would do well to make haste and cross the frontier into Switzerland. He passed through the Jura to Saint-Cergues—that beautiful view-point above Nyon whence one looks down, as out of an attic window, on to the Lake of Geneva ; and so his fresh series of unimportant but delightful adventures began.

His first acquaintance was Reboul, the guide who used to help Madame de Staël's friends to escape from the Terror and the guillotine to Coppet ; and the simple beauty of Reboul's daughter reminded him of Graziella, and so moved him to tears. " Your mother must be very anxious about you," she said. " My sisters are all praying for me," he answered. " They are good girls like you, though younger." And then " she kissed me on my departure," and no doubt that courtesy also reminded him of Graziella.

The Château de Vincy was his next stage. M. de Vincy, he had been told, was a Bernese aristocrat, and a French agent who would give him a *visa* for his passport, and tell him where, if anywhere, the French royalists were organizing an expeditionary force in Switzerland. Abbé Lafond, M. de Vincy informed him, was getting together the nucleus of an army at Chaux-de-Fond ; so he had better go to Neuchâtel.

He started, but had only got as far as the bottom

of the garden when he heard the flutter of pursuing petticoats. It was Madame de Vincy, inviting him to stop and dine and sleep at the château. He accepted, and there followed an invitation to remain for several weeks, and be treated "like a son and a brother." He stayed, and "life," for a season, "was delicious"; and he seized the opportunity to go down the hill and catch a glimpse of Madame de Staël. He might have presented himself to her, but lacked the courage, preferring to hide in a ditch, "fortified with a slice of bread," and a copy of *Corinne*, which he read while waiting for her carriage to drive by on the road from Coppet to Geneva. Madame Récamier was with her—"genius with its court of beauty"; and he felt no wish to speak or be spoken to. It was enough for him, he felt, to have been dazzled.

Having been dazzled, and having no other excitement or experience in view in the neighbourhood, he drove along the foot of the Jura to Neuchâtel, and climbed the hill to Chaux-de-Fond to look for the Swiss equivalent of the Army of Coblentz. He inquired for the army in an inn, and the innkeeper set beer and bread and cheese before him, and promised to go and fetch the army. He fetched, in fact, Abbé Lafond; and the Abbé sat down at the table to share Lamartine's meal, read his letter of introduction, and exclaimed: "L'armée! c'est moi."

He was a leader, in fact, without followers, persuaded that he could dispense with followers, trusting that rumour would magnify the significance of his movements, and that a French Army of Observation would be detailed to observe the non-existent. An ingenious plan, but one in which there was no useful

part for Lamartine. "Have lunch with me," he said, "and permit me, after lunch, to leave you and pray for you, for that is all that I can do;" and then he drove back to Nyon, and hired a boat, and crossed to Narnier on the Savoy side of the Lake.

Narnier was, in Lamartine's life, the analogue of Les Charmettes in Rousseau's life—or would have been if Rousseau's account of the idyll of Les Charmettes had been true. He lived alone there for some weeks in the late spring and early summer of 1815, sheltered from the confusing noises of the world; while the fate of France, and of Europe, was being decided at Ligny, and Quatre Bras, and Waterloo. He had nothing to do but to read, and sit in the sun, and be waited on by a boatman's daughter. The boatman's daughter thought he must be a Seminarist because he read so much—study and piety, he found, were indissolubly associated in simple minds; but the book which absorbed him was precisely Jean-Jacques' *Confessions*, which is by no means a manual of devotion.

He revelled in its "sensibility"; he delighted in the idea of leading such a life as Jean-Jacques had led; but he never confused Jean-Jacques' ideals with his own.

The temptation was there, no doubt. The boatman's daughter was charming, and innocent, and naïve. He could not quite conceal his admiration—especially when, in her innocence, she sat down on the edge of his bed. He asked her if she was married, and when she told him that she was not, he gave her a glance which implied that "the man who made such a beautiful young woman happy would indeed be fortunate." But that was all.

"She perceived that I had been well brought up, and that her innocence had nothing to fear from me. So she sat down on the bed and talked to me with a frank friendliness which made me more shy and modest than ever. Why cannot men understand that reserve inspires love far more certainly than licence—that it is a woman's glory to be respected—that unchastity in act or word is a kind of contempt for her?"

So there was no story—except that Lamartine and the boatman's daughter wept together over the body of a dead dog; and one only cites the passage as a kind of testimonial. For a subaltern in the Guards, Lamartine was, it must be admitted, a little over fond of dalliance with daughters of the people; but he made a point—which some subalterns in the Guards might have failed to make—of dallying virtuously. One may be chaste, and yet of an exquisite sensibility—that is the underlying thought which animates his confidences; and if his chaste sensibility sometimes caused the daughters of the people to suffer—well, is not the effect of suffering to purify?

He was to find it so himself, and that before very long. The loss of Graziella had left him heart-whole, though sentimental; and he does not pretend to have felt any poignant pangs at parting from the boatman's daughter. If his "eyes were moist," as he tells us, when he said good-bye to her, that was only because, guardsman though he was, he had acquired the habit of tears, and did not resist it. When Elvire entered into his life, it would be different.

But he knew nothing of Elvire as yet, and was

only awaiting the right moment to return to France and resume his duties in the royal service.

"It cost me a good deal," he says, "to quit this place of refuge which God had found me in the desert;" but if he lingered on at Narnier for a fortnight after the news of Waterloo had reached him, that was chiefly because his mother urged him not to come home until he heard that the King was once more safely at the Tuileries. When he knew that the second Restoration was indeed accomplished, he set out by way of Geneva and Chambéry, where he had friends—his old school-fellow Louis de Vignet, and various members of the De Maîstre [1] family.

From Chambéry, of course, he made his pilgrimage to Les Charmettes, where his signature may still be read in the visitors' book, and where he devoted an entire morning to his sentimental meditations. At Les Charmettes, he reflected, Jean-Jacques had "lived the ideal life of adolescent love" in the delightful society of Madame de Warens,—quitting her later to become "an adventurer in quest of glory" and "a sophist spouting about sentiment": a criticism which affords a further proof that there were limits to the hero-worship of the earlier Romantics. And then he proceeded to the Chambéry tailor's, and ordered a new suit of clothes, in which to travel becomingly to Mâcon, Beauvais, and Paris. "Such," he concludes, "is the story of my emigration."

[1] The family of which the most conspicuous members were Joseph de Maîstre, the Russian minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia, author of *Soirées de Saint Pétersbourg*, and his brother Xavier de Maîstre, author of the more famous *Voyage autour de ma Chambre.*

At Paris he resumed his military duties, but soon resigned his commission because, as he says, he was too rich to need the pay, but had too little influence to be hopeful of preferment. He went home, and "knocked about," being much addicted, at this period of his life, to gambling, as well as to flirtation with young women of the lower orders.

Neither of the two diversions, however, satisfied his soul. He was "plunged in abysms of gloom," and sick of the "maladie du siècle"—the malady of Lara, and Werther, and René. His soul was "ulcerated" and his heart had "turned to ashes." His *liaisons*, he thought, had been "frivolous"; he was ashamed and penitent, proud of his "solitary sufferings," and had "lost faith in happiness,"—at the age of twenty-six. Although, in fact, in perfect health, he seemed to pine away.

A cure, it was thought,—a medical cure and the strict *régime* of a watering-place—might do something for him. He was dispatched, in that hope, in the autumn of 1816, to Aix-les-Bains, to drink the waters, and walk about on the hills, and row on the lake. He adopted all these measures, and they did not matter. What mattered was that, at Aix-les-Bains, he met Elvire,—the Elvire of the *Méditations poétiques*.

It was assumed, at one time, that Elvire was a poet's imaginary nymph or sylph; but even poets, we may take it, need experience before they can imagine to any convincing effect. The story of Elvire, at any rate, was the story of a true experience,—the one permanently serious experience of Lamartine's

long life. He had told the story at length, and in prose, in *Raphaël;* and *Raphaël* is a true story in the same sense as *Graziella.*

In *Raphaël* Elvire appears as Julie; and Julie was her real name. She had been Julie Bouchaud des Hérettes, and she was now Madame Charles, the young wife of the eminent elderly aëronaut who had explored the skies in the same balloons as Montgolfier—the "chemist Charles" of Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution;* but we have no need to go to *Raphaël* for the narrative of her weakness. Letters have been recovered at intervals—some of them quite recently: both Lamartine's letters, and those of Madame Charles; and even Lamartine's mother, who was not in his confidence, and whom we shall see him deceiving with the connivance of his friends, had her suspicions, which she recorded in her Diary:—

"Alphonse" (she wrote) "has all the air of being crushed by a secret sorrow. He says nothing to me about it, but I fear I know what it is. His addiction to solitude is unnatural in a young man of his soaring imagination. The loss of some beloved object, whether by death or otherwise, must be the cause of his deep melancholy."

That was written in 1818 when the affair with Madame de Charles was over, and Lamartine was seeking consolation for his sorrow in poetry. We will now go back to 1816, and pick up the threads, and tell the story.

CHAPTER X

Julie Bouchaud des Hérettes—Her marriage to M. Charles—Her illness—Her meeting with Lamartine at Aix—Love-making on the Lac de Bourget—Lamartine's version of the story in *Raphaël*—Julie's return to Paris—Lamartine's desire to follow her—Money difficulties—The false pretences by which he overcame them.

Julie Bouchaud des Hérettes, born in 1784—six years older, that is to say, than Lamartine—belonged to an old commercial family, established for many generations at Nantes. Her mother was a Creole, and she had spent seven or eight years of her childhood on an indigo plantation in San Domingo. Her mother died there, and her father brought her back to France in 1792. The Revolution ruined him. He could not pay his taxes or his daughter's school bills; so Julie was adopted by her uncle and aunt, M. and Madame de Bergey.

When her aunt died, her uncle continued to take care of her until, in 1804, M. Charles offered himself as a suitor. The great aëronaut was fifty-eight, but of distinguished appearance and still handsome, carrying his years lightly. Julie was only twenty; but she had no dowry; and, in France, the man who is willing to marry a dowerless maid is regarded as possessed of more than human virtue and benevolence. The match was a good one for her—much better than her poverty entitled her to expect. Her

father opposed it, but her uncle insisted and had his way.

Julie, it would seem, was neither specially attracted by her husband nor specially repelled by him. He was a good, kind, fatherly man, who gave her a home and a position, and even a salon in which to receive distinguished people. Under the Empire her guests were chiefly *savants;* but after the Restoration some politicians joined the company. Lally-Tollendal, and M. de Bonald—the high-minded Catholic reactionary who "made a religion of keeping people in their place"—were the best known of them. No children were born of the marriage; and the years passed uneventfully until 1816, when Julie was thirty-two and M. Charles was seventy. In that year, her health being bad—far worse, indeed, than either her husband or the doctors knew—she went to Aix-les-Bains for a "cure."

Her husband was also ill—he had been suffering from gravel since 1811—and could not accompany her. She arrived early in July, and remained through the summer; and towards the end of August, Lamartine appeared, lodging in the same house with her, and sleeping in the adjoining room.

He was twenty-six, and of that rare beauty on which it is not unfitting to bestow the epithet "sublime." "Never, I fancy," writes his latest biographer,[1] "was a head more god-like set in the marvellous frame of the valley of Aix, against the deep blue background of the Savoy skies;" and the portraits warrant this enthusiasm. Moreover, Lamartine was

[1] M. Léon Séché.

full of melancholy and of the desire for love. He had been writing to Virieu of the "vague, sublime, and infinite ideas" which floated through his mind when he heard the wind sighing through the forests, and he went on—

"Ah, yes, if only I could find, as a cure for my trouble, such a woman's face as I used to dream of, I would love her with all the capacity of my heart—as passionately as any man upon this earth will ever love. My heart leaps in my breast—I feel it and I hear it. God only knows all that it contains, and all that it longs for. . . ."

And here, at last, at Aix, love was waiting for him; and in a few days' time—somehow, one does not know exactly how—he and Julie had become acquainted.

According to *Raphaël*, she was wrecked in a storm on the Lac de Bourget, and he rescued her; but the storm is, in all likelihood, a literary device, borrowed, as the setting of the great scene in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's love-story was borrowed, from *La nouvelle Héloïse*. Wrecks on these little lakes are rare, and acquaintances are easily made without them in quiet watering-places which the end of the season is emptying. A young man does not wait for a boat to be upset before he dares to speak; a young woman does not expect him to—at any rate if he is a fellow-boarder. Eyes meet; an excuse presents itself; banality breaks the ice—for the ice is very thin. No doubt things happened like that in Lamartine's case as in others; and then, the ice being broken and dispersed, he and Julie sat together in the sun, among the ruins of the old Abbaye of Haute-Combe, exchanging confidences.

Not precisely, perhaps, the confidences which the pages of *Raphaël* report. Julie cannot have told Lamartine that she was an orphan, for her father lived until 1821; nor can she have told him that her husband was the School Inspector who had been attracted to her while passing the Academy for Young Ladies under review. That is another "literary device," borrowed, as those who have read the earlier chapters of this book can see, from Aimé-Martin's account of the wooing of Désirée de la Fite de Pelleporc by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. We must no more look for accuracy there than in the narrative of the wreck and the rescue from drowning.

There are other details, too, in which exactitude is equally to seek. One suspects, for instance, the scene in which Lamartine describes himself as imprinting a long kiss on Julie's feet: the context shows that she had her boots on at the time. One equally suspects the scene in which he pictures himself kneeling before her with his head buried in the grass: the attitude is more grotesque than dignified. Nor can he have made love quite so violently as he says while boating on the lake: the boat would have capsized if he had done so. Nor is it very credible that he entangled Julie and himself in the meshes of the fisherman's net, meaning that they should throw themselves into the water and be drowned together. In all these particulars, it is very clear, the romance has been allowed to run ahead of the realities.

Yet it is just as clear that a large measure of essential truth remains. Above all, the underlying emotional truth of the story does not admit of doubt.

Lamartine was of a temperament at once religious

and voluptuous ; prone, as were all the Romantics, to confuse the love of God with the love of his neighbour's wife. His essays in dissipation had left his soul unsatisfied and hungering for some holier passion. He told Julie so—for that is the sort of confidence which a young man likes to make. And Julie, on her part, had only loved her husband as a daughter loves her father—he had expected nothing more ; and she felt that she was dying, and thought it cruel that she should have to die without having known the abandonment of an exclusive passion. It was the story over again—the Romantics are always repeating each other's stories—of Pauline de Beaumont and Chateaubriand.

So they rowed on the lake, and wandered in the woods, serene and melancholy, at the season of the falling of the leaf, allowing love to lay hold of them unresisted, making a religion of love, and yet, it seems —for on that point Lamartine's protestations are convincing—loving chastely.

Not that their passion was checked, so far as one can gather, by any sense of duty whether to God or man. Lamartine, a Pantheist rather than a Catholic, made love while he preached, and urged the claims of spirit and sense with equal ardour. Julie, a Deist, brought up in the worship of Reason, did not even seem to think that M. Charles—who was so fatherly and allowed her so much latitude—would really mind. She bade her lover do with her what he would if his happiness required it, and if he was quite sure that he understood all that the sacrifice which he asked implied. But she was ill, so ill—so weak—so afraid of emotion. That, we may take it, is the true inward-

ness, though he does not say so, of her answer to his appeal to her, one night, to draw back the bolt from the door which separated their two rooms.

As usual in these mountain hotels, they could hear each other's voices through the partition, and so, to quote *Raphaël*:—

"'Ah, why are you so far away?' I murmured. 'Why is there this wall between us?'

"'Is it only the door, then, that stands between us?' she answered. 'Only the door, and not your will and your promise? Come! If it is only the material barrier which restrains you, you may cross it;' and then I hear her hand drawing back the bolt.

"'Yes, you can come to me now,' she said. 'If there is no force in you stronger than your love, controlling you, then you can enter;' and she continued, in accents at once more passionate and more solemn—

"'I refuse to owe my protection to anything but yourself. You will find a love here equal to your own. But, as I have told you, in this love of mine, you will also find my death.'"

Whereupon, Lamartine tells us, he fell, "conquered and overcome, in the attitude of a man wounded to the death, on the threshold of the closed door;" and his love thereafter, unsatisfied though returned, was transfigured into an ecstatic and mystical passion:—

"What happiness was mine! The degraded desires of sensual passion were lost (since she had willed it so) in our mutual possession of each other's

souls. My happiness made me, as always, a better and more pious man than I had ever been before. God and Julie were so completely confounded in my thoughts that my worship of her became also a perpetual adoration of the Divine Being who had created her. I chanted but one hymn, and there were but two names in my hymn ; for Julie was God, and God was also Julie."

That is the note ; and it is none the less the dominant note of Romanticism because, when the later Romantics thought of a woman as God made incarnate, they did not feel that the obligation to chastity was for that reason incumbent on them. The chastity, in this case, as we have seen, was only the accident of circumstances ; and if any critic of life should choose to quote the scriptural saying about the man who "looketh on a woman to lust after her," it would not be open to any other critic to say that the quotation was inapt. For with the Romantics, as has been said and will be seen, religion was seldom separated in thought from the adoration of a neighbour's wife.

One need not stop to be censorious, however, so long as there is a story to be told ; and the next stage of the story was reached when Julie received the letter which called her back to Paris.

Her husband, it seemed, was uneasy. He wished to "embrace her and give her his blessing before he died." His letter was full, not only of "paternal tenderness," but also of "playful allusions to the handsome young brother who was causing her to forget her other friends,"—and about whom, it seems,

she had told him as much as she thought it good to tell him, but no more. Moreover, he had not only summoned her, but had sent a courier to fetch her; so that it was obvious that the lovers must part—at least for the time being.

They might travel together as far as Mâcon, but hardly farther. That would have seemed an excess of brotherliness even to M. Charles who took such a liberal view of the privileges of brothers; and though it would have been possible for Lamartine to follow her to Paris in a separate conveyance, there was a difficulty about money. He was dependent on his parents, and had spent all that they had given him for his "cure." It would have been awkward to ask for more, instantly and urgently, for such a purpose. A pretext—a reasonably plausible pretext—must first be found.

According to *Raphaël*, Lamartine sold his watch and chain, and the epaulettes and gold lace of his uniform, and procured himself thirty-five louis in that way; and there is a local tradition, among friends of the family, to the same effect. Probably, however, the local tradition has its source in *Raphaël*, and in any case, the correspondence shows that it is not true. What actually happened was that Lamartine returned to his parents' country-house, at Milly in the neighbourhood of Mâcon, and cast about him for a pretext, which he quickly found.

His friend, Aymon de Virieu, lately appointed Secretary of Embassy at Rio di Janeiro, unexpectedly returned to Paris. Aymon would like to see him, and would smile on this adventure as he had smiled on the adventure with Graziella. So Aymon must write him

such a letter as he could show to his parents, inviting him to Paris, and giving him a good reason for coming, —promising, for instance, to use influence, to pull wires, to job him into a Government office, or something of that sort.

Aymon wrote, as requested. Lamartine's mother opened her purse, and he was able to set out, arriving at the Hôtel de Richelieu, Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, where Virieu was staying, on Christmas morning, 1816. Virieu went at once, while he was dressing, to ask Julie when he might call, and the answer was an invitation to present himself on the same evening.

CHAPTER XI

Lamartine allowed to call on Julie—Their meeting in her salon—Her passionate letter—Lamartine offers her verses originally written for Graziella—Her disappointment and coldness—The peace made by Aymon de Virieu—Walks in the Tuileries gardens—Rapid progress of Julie's illness—She is taken into the country—Her conversion—She tells Lamartine she must "expiate"—He receives the news of her death—*Méditations poétiques.*

ACCORDING to *Raphaël* the lovers not only met on that Christmas evening, but were privileged to meet alone. The scene, like the scene of the wreck, is famous, and has been treated as historical. Lamartine, we read, fell upon his knees, declaring his devotion. Julie fell upon hers, that she might stroke his hair, just as she had stroked it in the days when they had floated together on the lake at Aix, and then——

A sudden knock at the door! They had just time to leap in confusion to their feet, when the door was thrown open, and there entered—M. de Bonald. He was, as M. Anatole France has cynically put it, "God's man of business upon earth;" and he had come now upon God's errand—to save the impetuous lovers from themselves.

Perhaps. It is likely enough that something of the sort happened at some stage—but not on that first evening. The truth, we must take it, is not in *Raphaël* but in the letters; and from them it appears that, on that Christmas night, Julie was

"receiving." Lamartine was only one caller among many. Aymon de Virieu was with him. He met several people besides M. de Bonald. Presumably he also met M. Charles. No renewal of the confidential talk was possible. He went away disheartened; but he had his consolation on the morrow.

When the guests had gone, Julie had sat down in her bedroom to write to him. It was a long, long letter—a letter of fire and flame; and a special messenger brought it to him in the morning before he was up:—

"Is it really you, Alphonse—you whom I held in my arms, and who escaped from me as happiness escapes? Or was it only a heavenly vision sent to me from God? And will He suffer it to come again, and shall I once more see my darling, and my angel whom I worship? . . . How cruel they were to come between us! And, oh, what a wrong they have done us! How I longed to say to them all: 'Leave me! You see that I don't belong to you, and that I have suffered, and that if I am to live, I must be nursed back to life upon his breast!' . . .

"My first impulse, when they left me, was to throw myself on my knees and worship with tears the supreme goodness which has restored Alphonse to me . . . God gives me leave to love you, Alphonse. I am quite sure of that. If He forbade it, would He allow every passing instant to increase my devouring passion for you? Would He have permitted us to meet again? Would He have showered the treasures of His kindness on us with full hands, merely to snatch them away from us with barbarous cruelty? . . .

"How slowly the night passes, and how it tortures me! So I am not mistaken, Alphonse, and you are really here! We are really living in the same city! But I shall not feel sure of it until to-morrow. I must see you again before I can believe in my happiness. This evening, my trouble is too terrible. Dear valley of Aix! It was not thus that you brought us together —you were not so miserly of the joys of heaven! But what an evening it was! How we must hope for better evenings to come! For generally, you see, I am alone!"

So far mere ecstasy; but then Julie becomes practical and arranges an appointment:—

"To-morrow, unhappily, I shall not be free before half-past twelve. I have to go to the Palace with M. Charles on some business or other, and we start at half-past eleven. I reckon that will take me about an hour. Wait for me, in your apartment, my angel. I will come and fetch you as soon as I am free, and we will spend the rest of the morning together. Pray God that our life and strength may last till then; and write to me by my messenger to tell me that you still love me."

That was the renewal; and if one were to stop to speak of all the appointments made and kept, the story would be long and perhaps monotonous, as such stories are apt to be to those who are not living them, but only looking on. Verses, of course, played a part in it, as they always do when the lover is a poet, but not precisely the part which one would have expected. For Lamartine had verses ready, and it seemed a pity

that they should be lost or wasted; so he laid at Julie's feet the verses originally consecrated to Graziella's memory.

It was a mistake, of course, and one can only guess how he came to fall into it. It has been suggested that he wished to make Julie jealous, and that Aymon de Virieu—a practical man in the affairs of love—assured him that this way lay the path to conquest. He had already conquered, however, and he knew it—the passionate letter quoted cannot have left him any room for doubt—so that this explanation is a weak one; and perhaps one needs no other explanation than a poet's and a young man's vanity. At any rate he did make the mistake, and the consequences of it may be assumed to have surprised him.

There was no jealousy in Julie's answer, but only resignation. She had "devoured" the lines; and she understood, and was filled with sympathy and pity. Ah, no, she wrote. No woman had ever been loved like Elvire, and no woman had ever deserved love so well. No wonder Lamartine was inconsolable for her loss—no wonder that her place in his heart could never be taken by another! It was a reason the more why she on her part must only love him as a mother might. She might have longed for more, but she would make that suffice. His real life, no doubt, was in the skies, and he would have nothing to say any more to any earthly passion: "So I will say no further word, Alphonse, but will pray to God to give me strength to love you silently."

Which was not at all what Lamartine had meant. He had meant his poetry to be taken seriously—up to a point; but Julie had taken it seriously far beyond

that point. He had meant to show Julie how passionately it was in him to love; and she inferred that he had loved so passionately in the past that he could never love again. A curious *impasse*—and what was the way out of it?

The practical thing seemed to be to send Aymon de Virieu to explain. He had known Graziella, and had himself had a passing flirtation with Graziella's friend, and consequently knew, and could point out, that these sentimental passages of early manhood did not really count. Graziella had been very charming, but, after all, the poet had idealized her after the way of poets. It was not the real cigarette-maker (or coral-polisher) but the ideal woman whom he had loved. His heart, in spite of its memories, was free. It was absurd to treat the memories as a fetter.

Aymon de Virieu was sent to say such things as those, and duly said them with all the persuasive eloquence of a rising young diplomatist; but Julie was not so easily to be persuaded. Lamartine had loved Graziella once, even if he did not love her now. If he had been capable of forgetting once, he might forget again. Just as he now spoke of Graziella, so he might one day speak of her. The second Elvire might pass out of his life like the first. She had loved too well, and now she was afraid; she dared not trust him.

So she came almost to reproaches, and he came almost to returning them—all through his unfortunate verses. If she did not believe him, then there was nothing more to be said, and nothing more for him to do but to leave Paris. She would not talk thus, if she really loved him.

But she did love him, and she did not want him to go. She had confessed her love once, but now she confessed it again, with even greater vehemence of passion :—

"I am quite capable of giving up everything in the world for you, and throwing myself at your feet, and saying: 'I am your slave. Do what you will with me. I am lost, but I am happy. I have sacrificed everything to you—reputation, honour, social condition—and what do these things matter? Here is my proof that I worship you. You can no longer doubt me; and it is beautiful to die, for your sake, to everything that I held dear before I met you. Nothing can weigh in the balance against the sacrifices which I am ready to make for Alphonse. If he thinks the prejudices of mankind ridiculous, then I too will cease to respect them. I shall always be able to find a roof to cover my head,—and a turf to cover it when he has ceased to love me.'"

The proof that Julie was not, in the full sense, Lamartine's mistress, leaps to the eyes in that letter. No woman would, in such language, offer, or affect to offer, what she had already given, or make exactly that appeal to magnanimity. Doubts have been expressed, it is true, as to the lover's response to the appeal. M. René Doumic, in particular, has been sceptical;[1] but his scepticism seems unreasonable and unjust. Julie was ill, fragile, and failing. Even emotion, though it stimulated, also weakened her; and insistence on the claims of passion would have been

[1] In an article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes.*

cruelty. The secret of his self-restraint is there; and he was happy, though he knew that his happiness must be transitory, in spite of it.

For four months—from the beginning of January until the end of April—they saw each other almost daily. In the late mornings or early afternoons, they walked together, when the weather was fine, in the Tuileries gardens or on the river embankment; and, as the least actions of a great man are apt to be remarked and remembered, we have a record of that in the *Souvenirs* of Charles Brifaut, a forgotten French Academician :—

"Now and again" (writes Brifaut) "I used to meet him in the gardens or on the quays, giving his arm to a young woman with a pale face, a melancholy manner, and a slow and languorous walk. I supposed at the time that she was his sister, though afterwards I came to know. . . . But then I kept within the limits of that hypothesis . . . and yet I speculated. . . ."

Then, in the evening, whatever the weather, they met in the intimacy of Julie's boudoir; and, as there generally were other callers, and as it seemed better to avoid all prying eyes, and give no handle to gossip, it was arranged that Lamartine, instead of sitting the others out, should stay outside till they had gone.

They left at ten—Julie, as an invalid, was only "at home" until that hour. They were "carriage people," so that the instant of their departure could easily be noted. Lamartine paced the bridge, and stationed himself at the corner of the quay, in the dark, and watched, looking up at the lighted window which shone for him like a star. Ten struck, and carriage

after carriage stood for a moment at the door and drove away. The departure of the last of them was Lamartine's signal ; and the great front door was carefully left ajar for him. He pushed it open, and slipped silently up the stairs to the boudoir where Julie, lying on her sofa, waited for him. He stayed till midnight, holding her hand, talking in whispers, and then slipped out, as quietly as he had entered, while Julie turned to her desk to write the letter which her messenger would hand him in the morning when he woke.

Such was the manner of their life until the spring, and then they had to part.

Julie was getting worse. Her cough troubled her, and the hectic flush of consumption showed its danger signals on her cheeks. It was arranged—there was no resisting the arrangement—that she should be taken to stay with friends in the country ; and Lamartine could not go with her. For one thing, he had spent all his money ; for another he was himself ill ; but the jealous care of the friends must, after all, have been the gravest of the obstacles. So they said good-bye, for the time, promising each other to meet again at Aix in the following September.

But that was not to be. The doctors knew very little about consumption in those days, and there was no help for any of its victims. Julie continued to waste and waste away, and when September came, she was in no state to travel. We find her writing—not to Lamartine, but to another friend—of "fever," and "suffocating catarrh," and "shattered nerves." She has been five or six weeks in bed, and can only sit, for two or three hours a day, in the garden, in a condition which she describes as "pitiful."

That was the physical change which the passing of four months had wrought in her ; and there had been a moral change as well. M. de Bonald had talked with her, and "God's man of business on earth" had done his work. Julie, from a Deist, had become a Catholic who could not die without making her peace with the Church. She made it, though even then she was not without hope of living, and confessed, and received the Sacrament, and then she wrote to tell Lamartine what she had done, and what a difference the doing of it had made.

He, it will be remembered but must be repeated, had himself preached religion to her in the very act of making love ; and now he learnt that, as she had found religion, there must be no more talk of love. He would understand, she wrote, the duties which these great benefits imposed. She would discharge them, and he must write her no more letters such as she could not show to all the world. If she lived, she would "live to expiate" ; and therefore, and meanwhile—

"You mustn't answer this. I ought not to write to you ; but I knew how anxious you would be, and I feel sure that God would think it right that I should calm the solicitude of a child who loves his mother too dearly. He knows how good my child is ; He allows me to have him for my friend. How kind He is, this God of unspeakable kindness! And how gentle is His religion, and how consoling and sublime, when He vouchsafes the treasures of His indulgence to the sinner . . .

"Good-bye, my dear. I love you, and shall always love you, like a good and tender mother."

There are those who read the letter as a confession, and argue that as Julie wished to "expiate," she must have sinned. One would, indeed, be almost bound to think so if one did not know how very ill and feeble she already was when Lamartine first met her. But one does know that, and therefore one acquits her, and believes that the infidelity which she had to expiate was only an infidelity of the heart and mind. Even about that infidelity, of course, the censorious might have something to say. But then she "expiated," and she died, and she is "doubly dead in that she died so young."

She died, in fact, just two months after writing the letter quoted. Lamartine received the news, in a letter from her doctor, just after reading an *Ode on Glory* at the Mâcon Academy. He "went out into the woods, and wandered about like a madman for three days and three nights."

"I remember," he wrote long afterwards, in 1863, "that, from that day forth, thinking only of the time when I should be reunited to her, I reckoned the time in the opposite fashion to other men, striking off a day from my calendar, and saying to myself nightly when I went to bed—'One day less that I shall have to vegetate here apart from her! One day cancelled of the days which separate me from the moment when Eternity will reunite me to her without whom life is torture!'"

And then, having recovered himself a little, he wrote out the *Méditations poétiques*, and the Romantic Movement, already born in prose, was born in verse; and then, a little later, feeling perhaps that it is not good for man to live with memories alone, he married.

CHAPTER XII

Le Lac—The first Romantic Poetry—Marriage of Lamartine—His first hesitations and ultimate happiness—*La Muse française*—Charles Nodier—His first and only romance—His adventurous career—His salon at the Arsenal Library—The habitués of his salon.

THE temptation of quoting from the poem which Lamartine consecrated to the memory of Julie, now definitely renamed Elvire, is not to be resisted. The piece which most insistently claims to be quoted is *Le Lac*—

Un soir, t'en souvient-il? nous voguions en silence;
On n'entendait au loin, sur l'onde et sur les cieux,
Que le bruit des rameurs qui frappaient en cadence
Tes flots harmonieux.

Tout à coup des accents inconnus à la terre
Du rivage charmé frappèrent les échos;
Le flot fut attentif, et la voix qui m'est chère
Laissa tomber ces mots:

"O temps, suspends ton vol! et vous, heures propices,
Suspendez votre cours!
Laissez-nous savourer les rapides délices
Des plus beaux de nos jours!

"Assez de malheureux ici-bas vous implorent:
Coulez, coulez pour eux;
Prenez avec leurs jours les soins qui les dévorent;
Oubliez les heureux.

"Mais je demande en vain quelques moments encore,
Le temps m'échappe et fuit;
Je dis à cette nuit: 'Sois plus lente'; et l'aurore
Va dissiper la nuit.

"Aimons donc, aïmons donc! de l'heure fugitive,
Hâtons-nous, jouissons!
L'homme n'a point de port, le temps n'a point de rive;
Il coule, et nous passons!"

Temps jaloux, se peut-il que ces moments d'ivresse,
Ou l'amour à longs flots nous verse le bonheur,
S'envolent loin de nous de la même vitesse
Que les jours de malheur?

Hé quoi! n'en pourrons-nous fixer au moins la trace?
Quoi! passés pour jamais? quoi! tout entiers perdus?
Ce temps qui les donna, ce temps qui les efface,
Ne nous les rendra plus?

. . . . . .

O lac! rochers muets! grottes! forêt obscure!
Vous que le temps épargne ou qu'il peut rajeunir,
Gardez de cette nuit, gardez, belle nature,
Au moins le souvenir!

. . . . . .

Que le vent qui gémit, le roseau qui soupire,
Que les parfums légers de ton air embaumé,
Que tout ce qu'on entend, l'on voit ou l'on respire,
Tout dise: "Ils ont aimé!"

Here was at last the voice, in verse, of the new French generation clamouring at the door: a voice which was Catholic and pagan at once—Pantheistic if any one desires the word—"with all the vague yearning," to quote Mr. St. John Lucas,[1] "of modern idealism and all the poignant melancholy of modern regret." The door was thrown open, and the new poet entered—"intensely personal and sincere, with few but very noble ideas"—to accept the laurel, albeit with something of aloofness and disdain, and to found a new school, without quite realizing what he did, or how far his influence was to reach: inaugurating a Romantic Movement, be it added, not only in the field of literature, but also in the hearts of women, and

[1] In *The Oxford Book of French Verse*; Clarendon Press.

notably in the heart of one English woman, Miss Anna Eliza Birch.

Miss Birch, the daughter of a Major Birch, met Lamartine at Chambéry; and it is hardly too much to say that she fell in love with him because of his love for Elvire. Perhaps—for that is the sort of thing that one can never know—she thought that the love for Elvire was the love for an ideal, and that she herself, by living up to the ideal, might be accepted as the reality informing it. She snatched, at all events, at the chance of trying, and, being a Protestant, changed her religion for her lover's sake.

He married her, as has been said already—not because he was in love, but because he thought that it was time for him to marry. The hour of passion and romance had passed for him; but still, as he put it in another poem, written when the first bitterness of his agony was over—

> "Au fond de cette coupe où je buvais la vie
> Peut-être restait-il une goutte de miel!
> Peut-être l'avenir me gardait-il encore
> Un retour de bonheur, dont l'espoir est perdu!
> Peut-être dans la foule une âme que j'ignore
> Aurait compris mon âme, et m'aurait répondu."

He had drained the cup, that is to say, but not quite to the lees; at the bottom of the chalice a sweet savour might even yet await him. But he concealed neither from himself nor from his friends that the marriage, on his part, was a "mariage de raison." "I am not in love, not the least in the world," he wrote to one of them; "but the match seems a good one, and there are reasons for it." And to another: "I am trying to be as much in love as I can. Morally I find her quite perfect. I could wish she were a little

more beautiful, but I must put up with such beauty as she has." And to Aymon de Virieu, who was in his confidence and knew his secret, he spoke even of "repugnance" and "sacrifice" and a desire to make himself "agreeable to God" who would doubtless grant him "peace of mind" if he overcame his reluctance.

So he overcame it, and on the whole was happy; Miss Birch, though a little provincial and "collet-monté," as people said, being as devoted to him in his ultimate misfortune as in his present prosperity. But she did not make him forget; and the memory of her whom we may call indifferently Julie or Elvire continued to burn with an inextinguishable flame. Once, indeed, as has already been related, when he was quite an old man, a fellow-Academician referred to him, in public and in his presence, at a session of the Academy, as "the lover of Elvire." "Every one smiled," says the journalist who tells the story, "except M. de Lamartine himself, who maintained a grave and melancholy silence." His heart, in spite of a happy marriage, was still hankering for Elvire after all those years. He still remembered how much she had meant to him,—and also to the memorable litera y Movement which had by that time almost run its course.

But that story involves a long leap forward, and we must now travel back.

Lamartine, it must be repeated, though he inspired the Romantic Movement, and patronized and encouraged it, took no overt part in the organizing and launching of it. Soon after his marriage, he joined the diplomatic service and was sent to Italy, presently obtaining the appointment of Second Secretary at

Florence. Even when he was in France, he was rarely, and only for brief times, in Paris. Moreover, he was already looking towards the Academy with aspiring eyes, and knew that access to that exclusive body was not easily to be conquered by the hierophant of a new sect. He was contented, therefore, to write his poetry, and live his life, leaving to others the burden and heat of a combat which seemed to him hardly necessary.

Those others, more or less his disciples, and mostly his juniors, were originally seven in number: Alexandre Soumet, Alexandre Guiraud ("the two Alexanders" as they were called), Emile Deschamps, Saint-Valry, Desjardins, Alfred de Vigny, and Victor Hugo, excellent men all of them, full of enthusiasm for the reform of literature, though the fame of the two last-named overshadows that of the others. They were kindred spirits who had found each other, and felt the need of solidarity and mutual admiration; so they founded a literary magazine—*La Muse française*—and had their salons, in which they discussed their aims, and laid their plans, and recited their verses to each other, and gradually gathered in adherents.

The most notable of the salons was that of Charles Nodier, whose name, perhaps, is not so well remembered as it deserves to be, though his place in the Romantic Movement is not so much that of a great Romantic writer as that of the middle-aged patron and genial friend of youth.

His life, indeed, had been romantic, but not in the passionate sense. His one romance of that sort, as he used to relate with a kind of melancholy humour, ran its course, and reached its catastrophic close while he

was still a little boy in knickerbockers. At the very beginning of the Revolution—he must have been about ten years of age—he fell in love with a married woman, a baroness of the *ancien régime.* Too timid to speak, he was nevertheless bold enough to write a letter in his round school-boy hand, declaring his passion, and asking for an assignation. The baroness gave him his appointment ; he went to keep it with a beating heart ; but the sequel was unexpected. He was partially undressed, and laid across the lady's knee, and so punished for his presumption and precocity. "Since then," he said, "I have never dared to love again, for I have always been afraid of being whipped."

A queer issue truly to the first and last love of a man's life ; but there are other stories of Nodier's boyhood which show him to have been courageous as well as romantic. At the age of thirteen—in the year of the Terror, that is to say—he saved a girl from the scaffold, telling his father, who was the President of the Revolutionary Tribunal at Besançon, that he would stab himself to the heart in the court-room unless her life were spared. He got his way, and was afterwards sent into the country with his tutor, "to engage," as his father put it, "in the study of nature and truth." Presently we find him brought back to Besançon, and sent to school there, and getting into trouble for organizing a parody of a Jacobin Tribunal in a public place, and ultimately obtaining a clerkship in the Besançon Public Library.

It was in public libraries that his career was ultimately to lie, but there were to be vicissitudes first—the chief of them due to the publication of his satirical

pamphlet *Napoleone*. For this he was tried, and imprisoned for a brief time, and then ordered by the police to go home. He went home, but then, hearing a rumour that he was likely to be arrested, fled from the town by night, and went into hiding in the Jura. Apparently the police, not being very anxious to find him, did not take the trouble to look for him ; and, while persuaded that he was, if not a desperate character, at least a political refugee, he found temporary happiness in hunting butterflies.

Afterwards there were other vicissitudes, through which, as this book is not his biography, we need not trouble to follow him. He married a portionless bride at Dôle ; he became private secretary to a Sir Herbert Croft, and helped a Lady Hamilton to write a novel in French ; he edited a newspaper at Laybach when Fouché was Governor of Illyria ; he contributed to the *Journal des Débats ;* he published books ; he did many other things. But he only properly belongs to this narrative from the time when having been appointed Librarian of the Arsenal, in Paris, he gathered, so to say, into his salon the fragments that remained of the Romantic Movement after *La Muse française* had gone the way of most literary periodicals founded by sanguine youth.

That was in 1824, when he was in his forty-fifth year—twelve years younger than Chateaubriand, who had long since almost abandoned literature for politics, ten years older than Lamartine, seventeen years older than Vigny, twenty years older than Victor Hugo. He was clever enough—he had written *Trilby* long before it occurred to George Du Maurier to write another book of the same name ; but the real secret of

his significance lay in his personality rather than in his literary gifts. He was, before everything else, a delightful talker, well-informed, simple-minded, genial, a man of many friends—a Romantic, perhaps, chiefly because he and the Romantics liked each other. He kept open house for them at the Arsenal, for many years—both before they had "arrived" and afterwards; and practically the whole of literary France passed through his apartments during the period. *Boutique romantique* was Alfred de Musset's name for his reception-room.

Most of his guests have written out their recollections of his receptions; and all the witnesses agree that they were charming and simple and merry, devoid of all pompous and punctilious formality. Dinner was at six, and the table was always laid for three or four or more visitors, not specially invited, who might drop in if they felt inclined. Sunday was the great night, and then, at eight punctually, the party adjourned to the drawing-room—it was a party of women as well as men—to talk as well as listen.

As a rule it was Nodier himself who did most of the talking. Standing with his back to the fireplace, while the others were grouped about the room, he told the famous story, related in his daughter's *Mémoires*, of the distressful issue of his unavailing passion for the baroness; or else he talked folk-lore or entomology,—two subjects on which he was full of information. Sometimes, again, he called upon Lamartine, who was occasionally present, or Victor Hugo, who, in the early days, was rarely absent, to recite some unpublished ode or elegy; while, at other times, the conversation was general and vivacious,—

MARIE NODIER

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the Philistines of the classical school being denounced with vigour, and attempts made to find a satisfactory definition of Romanticism. "Liberty directed by good taste" was Nodier's own definition, and it is as good as most.

It was agreed, however, that there was only to be two hours' talking; and Madame Nodier, who doubtless was a little out of her depth when literature was the theme, never failed to keep a careful eye upon the clock. At ten she signalled to her daughter Marie; and Marie opened the piano and sat down at it, and struck a chord. That was the signal. The conversation ceased at once. For the rest of the evening, and well on into the small hours, the juniors danced, while their elders amused themselves at cards. As Musset was to write, many years afterwards, the waltz which Marie played—

> "Rendait quelquefois matinal
> L'Arsenal."

Those were the joyous circumstances in which the Romantics began to feel their way and to come into their own; and if one were writing a book on the Muses of the Romantic Movement, one would enter Marie Nodier's name at the head of the list. Only in her case, as in her father's, there is no story worth telling to be told. She was pretty as well as charming. Most of the young men were in love with her; and very likely, human nature being what it is, she was in love with some of them. But that was all. Nodier, though he enjoyed the society of poets, had little confidence in them. He believed that they were all as "feckless" as himself; and he married his daughter to a junior clerk in the office of the Minister of Justice,

saying—"Now I can be sure that she will never lack her daily bread": a wise precaution, seeing that she had no dowry, and that he had to sell his books in order to buy her a trousseau.

Marie passed, therefore, from the *cénacle* to her bourgeois home, with an album in which all the great poets of the time, from Lamartine to Musset, had written complimentary lines; but the salon continued through the twenties, and on into the thirties, and the men of the Romantic Movement continued to gather in it, the juniors coming in to fill the gaps left by the seniors as they fell away—

> "Chacun de nous, futur grand homme,
> Ou tout comme . . ."

as Musset sings.

Dumas, Sainte-Beuve, Prosper Mérimée—these also, in addition to the men already mentioned, were of the company from time to time. The Arsenal was their common meeting-place in the enthusiastic days before they quarrelled, or grew cool, or for other reasons drifted apart. One would like, if space permitted, to dwell a little longer upon that golden interlude of dancing and high-thinking; but space is limited, and the men's real lives, which we are making our chief concern, were lived elsewhere. They had to learn what they were to teach, and most of them were to learn most of it from women.

There was to be a "fatal year,"—a year of crisis and *débâcle*, when the unlooked-for issues of love were to confound several Romantic lives simultaneously. We must proceed to that; and the story of Alfred de Vigny, who was the eldest of the company, may come first.

ALFRED DE VIGNY

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CHAPTER XIII

Alfred de Vigny—His military career—His early pessimism—Delphine Gay's desire to marry him—His reasons for not wishing to marry her—His marriage to Miss Lydia Bunbury—Her father's objections—Honeymoon trip to England—Vigny's interview with Sir Walter Scott—His mother warns him against the women of the theatre.

ALFRED DE VIGNY was an only son, the last scion of an old family whose patents of nobility dated from the sixteenth century. Educated at a school in which, as he has written, "the bulletins of Wagram and Eylau were read aloud in the class-rooms," he was ambitious, at first, not of literary but of military glory. At sixteen, he became, like Lamartine, with whom he was to have courteous but not intimate relations, an officer in the Guards. Like Lamartine, he escorted Louis XVIII to the frontier in 1815, and received his dismissal at Béthune.

"So that is all?"

So he soliloquized—or so he told his friend Brizeux[1] that he soliloquized; and that was the disdainful attitude towards military service which grew upon him as the years went by.

He remained in the army for about thirteen years, but saw no active service, and got but little promotion. He missed the chance of taking part in Chateaubriand's

[1] The Breton poet (1803–1858), still better remembered as a Breton antiquary.

so-called "war"—it was in reality no more than a military promenade—in Spain. His friends in high places did nothing for him, and he rose to no higher rank than that of captain. So, having abundant leisure on his hands, he gave it to melancholy meditations, and the reading of books, and the writing of poetry. Poetry, he told Brizeux, was his "one delightful resource against ennui"; and he went on—

"So you see I was quite out of my place in the army; and I had the little Bible which I have shown you carried for me in the knapsack of one of the men of my company. I also had *Éloa*,[1] and I had all my poems in my head. They all marched with me in the rain from Strasburg to Bordeaux, from Dieppe to Nemours and Pau; and whenever the order came to halt, I used to sit down and write. Every one of my poems is dated from the place in which I laid my head after I had written it."

Such was his outward life; and if we seek to know something of his inner life, we may get an intimate glimpse at it in that fragmentary *Journal d'un poète* to which it was his habit to confide his secret thoughts:—

"A PICTURE OF HUMAN LIFE

"My picture is of a crowd of men and women and children fast asleep. They wake up, and discover that they are in prison. They get used to their prison, and make little gardens in it. Then, presently, they perceive that they are being taken away, one after the other, never to return. They know neither

[1] His own poem.

why they are in prison, nor where they are taken afterwards—and they know that they will never know.

"Yet there are some among them who are continually arguing about their cases, and some who invent the particulars, and others again who tell their friends what will happen to them when they leave the prison, though they know nothing whatever about it.

"Are they not mad?

"Of course the governor of the prison might have informed us, if he had chosen, alike of the charge against us, and of our sentence.

"Since he has not chosen, and will never choose, to do so, let us put up with the more or less commodious quarters which he has assigned to us; and, since there is no way of escape for us from our common misery, let us not make it doubly miserable by interminable discussions. We cannot be sure of knowing everything even when we leave the dungeon, but we may be quite sure that we shall know nothing so long as we remain in it."

Probably the writer did not mean quite everything that he said. One can never be sure that literary pessimism is absolutely sincere. But there are always the potentialities of pessimism in the hearts of the men who dream such dreams as that; and already, in this passage, we seem to see Vigny, looking out upon life from the window of his ivory tower, and divining that it would prove a dreary business at the best.

Like Chateaubriand, however, he was to try experiments, and have his hours of illusion; and, in these early years at least, his pose was probably

regarded as Byronic, and classed with the deceptions which do not deceive. He was not yet famous, though the poems which he had published had been praised; but he was a handsome young officer in a handsome uniform—and sympathetic. That was how he impressed young women, and at least two young women fell in love with him.

Delphine Gay, the famous daughter of a famous mother, did so for one. She was another of the Muses of the Romantic Movement—the most beautiful, and also the most celebrated, with hair like gold, and eyes like stars, an intellectual brow and sweetly pouting lips: a poetess herself, though of more charm than originality. She met Vigny from time to time at the Arsenal, where she was one of the dancers. Her mother guessed her secret from her blushes when his name was mentioned. "You are in love with him?" she asked; and Delphine admitted that she was; and Madame Sophie Gay [1] embraced her, and promised to do her very best to help her to marry him and live happily ever afterwards.

She did what she could. Madame Desbordes-Valmore,[2] the famous poetess, was her confidante. She wrote to Madame Desbordes-Valmore, who was living at Bordeaux when Alfred de Vigny was stationed there, stating and pleading her case. "They match each other so well," she said, "in point of tastes and

[1] The wife of a functionary, the friend of Madame de Staël, and a prolific novelist and verse writer. Her songs were at one time popular, and her salon was of some note in the reign of Louis-Philippe.

[2] Madame Desbordes-Valmore (1786–1859) was an actress and the wife of an actor, though her fame as a poet has effaced that recollection. Her verse is among the best of her period.

DELPHINE GAY

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talents." And "how," she asked, "can a man like Vigny fail to be enchanted at the thought that he has quickened the pulse and troubled the heart of such a girl as my Delphine?" His "pure soul" must surely have been attracted by her "gifts and coquetry and grace."

But there were obstacles. Alfred was of the aristocracy and Delphine of the bourgeoisie. Delphine had no dowry, and Alfred was comparatively a poor man. His mother raised those objections, and he was not sufficiently in love to override them. M. Léon Séché suggests [1] that he had an objection of his own in the fact that, as Lamartine has recorded in a character sketch of her, Delphine "was too fond of laughing."

It may have been so. Poets—such poets as Vigny was—are a little apt to divine the emptiness of life at an age when young women still find it amusing; and, if they do so, they are also apt to perceive the likeness between the young women's laughter and the crackling of thorns under a pot. However that may be, and whatever messages Madame Desbordes-Valmore may have tactfully conveyed, the fact remains that Alfred de Vigny never spoke of love to Delphine, who soon afterwards married a newspaper editor, and became famous as Madame de Girardin. "Quand des rires," he wrote in a poem which he addressed to her more than twenty years afterwards—

> "Quand des rires d'enfant vibraient dans ta poitrine
> Et soulevaient ton sein sans agiter ton coeur,
> Tu n'étais pas si belle en ce temps-là, Delphine,
> Que depuis ton air triste et depuis ta pâleur."

A striking confirmation of the theory; and the

[1] In *Alfred de Vigny* (Juven.)

view seems sound that Alfred de Vigny did, indeed, find it a nuisance to have her cheerfulness breaking in upon his melancholy philosophy.

Then, after Delphine Gay—and very soon after her—came Lydia Bunbury, whom Vigny met in 1824 while he was in garrison at Pau.

Her falling in love with him is easy enough to understand. There was the uniform—that always counts for a good deal; there was the Byronic pose—and Byronism was just then fashionable; there was the poetry, which doubtless added a glamour, though Lydia, being almost ignorant of the French language, was obliged to take it on trust; finally, there was that definite, yet indefinable, quality "distinction." There was everything, in short, which might be expected to appeal to the imagination of a romantic young woman of five-and-twenty—which was Lydia Bunbury's age.

As for Lydia's attraction for Vigny—that, perhaps, is not so obvious; but one may make a guess at it. In her portrait she looks pretty, though rather silly and insipid; and even silliness—Lydia said, "proud as Luther" when she meant "proud as Lucifer"—is sometimes piquant if conveyed through the medium of a foreign language. Moreover, she was English, and Vigny was an Anglo-maniac, steeped in English poetry. One may almost say that he fell in love with her because he was already in love with Shakespeare; and no doubt the English freedom of intercourse, and the absence of chaperons, gave opportunities. At all events, he did fall in love and proposed marriage, and was accepted.

Lydia's father was displeased—his displeasures

being chiefly inspired, so far as one can see, by British prejudices. Just as Europeans profess to be unable to distinguish one Chinaman from another, so Mr. Bunbury seems to have subjected all Frenchmen to a common condemnation, feeling that one never knew who they were or what they would be up to next. This Frenchman of genius, well dressed and of elegant manners, whose dreamy blue eyes mirrored melancholy thoughts, was for him merely another Frenchman like the rest; and to the end of his days he failed to distinguish him clearly either from other Frenchmen or from other poets, as appears from an anecdote related in one of the "Lundis" of Sainte-Beuve :—

"At the time," writes Sainte-Beuve, "when Lamartine was Secretary of Embassy at Florence, Mr. Bunbury was introduced to him, and dined with him. During the dinner the Englishman mentioned to M. de Lamartine that he had a daughter who was the wife of one of the principal French poets. Asked for the name of the poet, he hesitated and could not remember it. Lamartine then ran through the list of the poets of the period, and at the mention of each of them the Englishman replied, 'No, no. That's not the man.' Not until Lamartine came to Alfred de Vigny did he answer, 'Ah, yes, I rather fancy that's his name.'"

Though he grumbled, however, Mr. Bunbury did not interfere; and Lydia seems herself to have smoothed the process of the negotiations by telling untruths about her dowry. According to the *Souvenirs littéraires* of Edouard Grenier, she once confessed as much

in public at the Arsenal, winding her arms round her husband's neck, and exclaiming in broken French: "Oh, je avé trompé vô, parce que je aimé vô;" but it is not recorded that he ever reproached her for this singular demonstration of her love.[1]

The marriage took place at Pau, in February 1825, and, if it was not as happy a marriage as might have been hoped, neither was it as unhappy as might have been feared.

Lydia never, throughout her life, succeeded in learning French. Vigny always had to act as her secretary and her interpreter. His own knowledge of English, though considerable—sufficient, at any rate, for the purpose of translating Shakespeare—was hardly adequate for the sustained intimacy and confidence of married life. That was one drawback; and it grew rather than diminished in gravity as the passing of the years stripped Lydia of her charms—or rather concealed those charms beneath mountains of excessive flesh. She was a "fine woman" at thirty, but she was massive at forty, and at fifty she was elephantine. So presently we find Vigny noting in his diary that it is labour lost to try to establish relations of ardour and mutual intelligence between Frenchmen and Englishwomen—that it is, in fact, "like drawing the fiddle-bow across a piece of stone."

At first, however, they thought they were going to be happy. They travelled in England, where other members of the house of Bunbury were far more affable than Lydia's father. Colonel Hamilton Bunbury in particular made the poet welcome, and intro-

[1] "Tromper" means, of course, to be unfaithful, as well as to deceive; but Lydia evidently did not think of that.

duced him to his friends. He took him to see, among other people, Sir Walter Scott in the Windsor Hotel. His note on his visit seems worth quoting, even though it is irrelevant to this story :—

"He was writing," Vigny says, "at an English desk of lime-wood, wrapped in a grey silk dressing-gown, with the light from the window falling on his white hairs. He rose with an air of great distinction, and took my hand affectionately in his, which was warm, though withered and trembling. Told by my uncle that I wished to offer one of my books to him, he accepted it with the air of a man much gratified by the compliment, and bade us be seated.

"'It is not every day that one meets a great man in these times,' I said to him. 'Up to the present I have only known Bonaparte, Chateaubriand, and yourself.'

"'I am flattered, deeply flattered,' he replied. 'I understand what you say though I cannot answer you in French.'

"I then felt that there was a wall between us. Seeing that my uncle was translating his English to me, he made an effort, speaking slowly, to express himself—

"'I am acquainted with this narrative,' he said, picking up *Cinq-Mars*. 'It is a fine epoch in the history of your country.'

"I gave him my address, and begged him to write to me, pointing out the faults of the book.

"'You must not ask me for criticism,' he said. 'I do not criticize. I feel.'

"Then he shook my hand with a fatherly air, his

own hand shaking a good deal. It seemed to me that he was impatient because I did not express myself well. My uncle thought that my visit had pleased and moved him. God grant that it may be so, and that all his days may be happy. I think he is sympathetic and shy. What a simple and illustrious old man!"

A graphic vignette, worth stepping aside to look at; and when we turn back to contemplate the picture of Alfred de Vigny's married life, we find that picture quite colourless by comparison.

Lydia, as it has been necessary to say, was getting fat; and she seems to have enjoyed a good deal of that serenity of temper with which the fat are popularly credited. Alfred, from the first until the last, was ceremoniously polite with her in an exaggerated, old-fashioned, eighteenth-century way. Only, as it happened, he asked more from her than she could give him,—just as he was afterwards to ask more from life than life could give him; and the time came when he tired of "drawing the fiddle-bow across a piece of stone," and made his gambler's throw for happiness elsewhere,—and in the theatre, of all places in the world.

His mother had warned him,—against what dangers, real sometimes as well as imaginary, do not our mothers warn us? She had written him a long letter of advice at the time of his entering the army. We know that he had kept the letter, for it was printed in *Le Sillon* in January 1905. It was specially explicit on the subject of the women of the theatre, whose "morals," Madame de Vigny wrote, "are as worthy

of our contempt as is their profession." And she continued, in the tone of a Puritan who was also an aristocrat—

"They are not less likely to damage your health than common prostitutes, and they are more dangerous than prostitutes in consequence of their limitless cupidity. I hope you will never look at them except through opera glasses, and never speak to them at all. Women of that class—I include the fair ladies who make a public display of their triumphs—should have no attraction whatever for a man of taste who desires refinement in his attachments."

It is true in the main, though perhaps put with excess of emphasis; and Alfred de Vigny was the last man in the world to run counter to such good advice for the ordinary reasons of ordinary youths. But he was a poet who wanted to write for the theatre; and writing for the theatre brings a man in contact with actresses; and a man may share his mother's opinions about actresses in general, and yet have an opinion of his own about one actress in particular. That, broadly speaking, was what happened when Alfred de Vigny met Marie Dorval, and made, as has been said, his gambler's throw for happiness.

CHAPTER XIV

Marie Dorval—Her early training and character—Her qualities and defects—She throws a flat-iron at an elderly admirer—Her triumphs on the Parisian stage—Her acquaintance with Alfred de Vigny—He treats her with respect—She tires of his respect and proposes more intimate relations—"On the breast of what a Magdalen does this Christ lay his head!"

MADAME DE VIGNY would have had to admit that Marie Dorval was not quite so bad a woman as she had declared all actresses, without exception, to be; but she would probably have made haste to add that she was quite bad enough.

She was not mercenary—that was her great saving grace. She did not sell her favours, but gave them; she preferred artists to stockbrokers; she never threw over a poor man for a rich one. There are many modern actresses—the sort of actresses who bring actions for breach of promise of marriage, or who even persuade peers or guardsmen or millionaires to marry them—of whom it is impossible to say as much; and it is a good deal to be able to say in Marie Dorval's case, seeing that her salary, even when she was the idol of Paris, was never more than about £600 a year. On the other hand—well, no doubt, there is a good deal to be said on the other hand as well. She had the morals, if not the greed, of her environment; she did not understand about honour, and that sort of thing. It made no difference to her that she was a

MARIE DORVAL

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married woman—except that she persuaded her lovers to write agreeable things about her husband in the public press. But let us begin at the beginning.

Marie Dorval was, so to say, a nobody from nowhere. Her parents were strolling players who had lived connubially, in the careless style of strolling players, without ever troubling to marry. Born at Lorient in 1798, she began to act almost as a baby. Left destitute, she married, at sixteen, a middle-aged comedian—"the first man who offered to take charge of me"—but not before throwing a flat-iron at the head of a wealthy provincial admirer whose intentions were not matrimonial. By the time she was twenty-one she was a widow with three children, and resolved that none of them should seek a career on the stage, because she "knew too much about it." Dull domesticity, she considered, should be the ideal of her daughters though it would not be hers.

Her first parts were in comedy and comic opera; but tragedy was her true line, and Goxlan told her so. "You a soubrette!" he exclaimed. "I picture you as a parlourmaid, carrying a tray. As soon as a good-looking young man entered, you would drop the tray, and throw your arms round his neck, crying 'Antony, my long-lost son!' and all the crockery would be smashed;" and she was, in fact, precisely of that irresistibly impulsive nature in private life as well as on the boards—sometimes loving fiercely, and sometimes ceasing to love capriciously—meaning well, but following her whims.

Somehow or other she found her way to Paris while she was still quite young, and was promoted, in

the course of time, from the Porte Saint-Martin—the home of melodrama—to the Théâtre Français ; and her successes belonged to the time when the rising young Romanticists were taking the Parisian stage by storm. She triumphed in Casimir Delavigne's *Marino Faliero*, in Victor Hugo's *Marion Delorme*, in Dumas' *Antony ;* and there was much Bohemian *bonhomie* in her relations with dramatic authors and dramatic critics. Gustave Planche of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*—he whom Victor Hugo described as "a fungus not afraid of being bitten because it knows that it is poisonous"—was privileged to be her lover for a season. She ran after Dumas in the street, exclaiming : "You understand women, so I will let you kiss me," and she addressed the great man as "mon bon chien," and let him sleep in her apartments—turning her second husband, a M. Merle,[1] out of the house to make room for him—in order that he might finish the last act of *Antony* under her eyes, and be sure to let her have it in time.

Such anecdotes show pretty clearly what sort of a woman she was ; and so does the story of her first meeting with George Sand. The novelist, then hardly known, had sent the actress a letter of homage, soliciting permission to call ; and, on the very next morning, the actress, moved by the compliment, ran up her stairs, and knocked at her door, exclaiming breathlessly : "Here I am !"

That was the time when George Sand was living connubially with Jules Sandeau ; and Marie Dorval invited them both to dine with her on the following

[1] A journalist and dramatic author, at one time manager of the Porte Saint-Martin.

Sunday. They did so, and George Sand and Marie Dorval became inseparable friends. The intimacy, however, did not prevent Marie Dorval from becoming Jules Sandeau's mistress as the years rolled on ; and that is another circumstance characteristic of the woman as well as of the age. Evidently she was a creature of impulse, driven every way by every impulse in turn, well-meaning, *bon enfant*, with her feet in the gutter even when her sublime head struck the stars. And that was the manner of woman that Alfred de Vigny was to find her.

One does not know exactly when or how he met her ; but all the Romantics were in the habit of meeting actresses, so that the question has no importance. The difference was that, whereas the others met many of them, and met them frequently, and consequently seldom took them more seriously than actresses should be taken, Alfred de Vigny came fresh from the glamour of poetry to the glamour of the stage. He knew nothing about actresses except what his mother had told him, and the subject is not one on which a young guardsman is likely to go confidently to his mother for trustworthy information. If he accepted his mother's generalizations, at least he made an exception in Marie Dorval's favour, and confusing the woman with the parts she played, sat down at her feet and worshipped her—and that though she was a married woman and he was a married man.

There was one aspect, indeed, of such relationships which he does appear to have grasped. He understood, at least, that a man in his position must not allow actresses to exploit him—must not wait for them at the stage door, or be seen with them in public places ; and

he was careful to do nothing of the kind. "Only to think," said Marie Dorval to a confidant, after it was all over, "that in all those years he never once took me out to dinner!" Considering that the years were six in number, that must certainly have seemed very remiss of him; but the remissness does not appear to have been the cause of the breach, and there is no record of any protest against it at the time. Marie Dorval, we may take it, understood and acquiesced.

Alfred de Vigny's love, we may also take it, appealed to her as something fresh and novel. She was only accustomed to Bohemian lovers who kissed her in a spirit of camaraderie, or regarded her as the predestined instrument of their pleasures. It would be too much to say that she had never met a gentleman before, but at all events no gentleman whom she had met had ever treated her as a lady; whereas Alfred de Vigny not only treated her as a lady, but addressed her as an angel or as a queen—not in the language of exaggerated gallantry, but with a sincere and almost religious devotion.

She knew, of course,—she must have known—that she did not deserve it. She may even have known that the time would come when she would get tired of it, and would hear the gutter calling, and would obey the call. But meanwhile the grand manner and the ceremonious respect made their appeal to her, and gave her a better opinion of herself. Aware that he loved an ideal and not the real Marie Dorval, she nevertheless was pleased with the ideal, and lived up to it as long as she could; and, after all, it was not difficult—at first. He had beautiful eyes—people said that he reminded them of Christ; and he wrote

charming things about her—and about her husband too, when she asked him ; and he brought La Malibran to see her, and embrace her, in her dressing-room ; and he was writing a play which was to have a wonderful part for her. She could not help loving him, for one must needs love the highest when one saw it ; and the day came when she refused to let Dumas kiss her, and he asked her why.

"I do believe you're in love with M. de Vigny," he said.

"I am madly in love with him," she answered ; and the rest was obvious and inevitable, though the initiative was hers.

It had flattered her at first to find that Vigny made no attempt to take the citadel by storm. She was not used to such hesitations, and she understood the compliment which they implied, and perhaps she even valued it the more because she felt that it was unmerited. Yet she also felt—for her training had taught her—that it was possible to have too much even of so good a thing as respect, and that a man should aim at a golden mean in the matter of chastity as well as of the other virtues. So, in the end, she grew impatient ; and, as Vigny still waited for a hint, she gave him one. Looking him in the eyes, one day—so runs the story picked up in theatrical circles by M. Léon Séché—she asked, point blank—

"And when are the parents of M. le Comte coming to ask me for my hand?"

It is the sort of question which, in English theatrical circles, usually invites marriage under pain of an

action for damages for breach of promise of marriage. But there are no actions for breach of promise of marriage in France, and Marie Dorval was already Madame Merle ; so that the question in her case bore quite a different meaning. And Alfred de Vigny, of course, came down from the clouds and realized that there was a point beyond which worshipful respect for actresses could not profitably be carried. He answered that there was no time like the present ; and their relations entered, the same evening, on their second phase.

" Make him happy, my child," wrote George Sand. " Such men as he is need happiness and deserve it."

And the world said—

" On the breast of what a Magdalen does this Saint lay his head ! "

But the lovers did not heed what the world said, and very likely did not hear it, being perfectly happy, in their several ways, and expecting greater happiness to come. For Vigny was to write *Chatterton ;* and Marie Dorval was to create the part of Kitty Bell ; and they were thus, as lovers, to achieve in collaboration the supreme artistic triumphs of their lives.

CHAPTER XV

The Romantic invasion of the theatre—The preface to *Cromwell*—The first night of *Hernani*—Théophile Gautier's red waistcoat—Alfred de Vigny's dramatic ambitions—*La Maréchale d'Ancre*—*Chatterton*—Marie Dorval as "Kitty Bell"—Her triumph in the part—She finds Vigny too solemn a lover and tires of him.

This is not the place in which to tell the full story of the conquest of the theatre by the Romantics; but one may stop to say a word or two.

The way was paved by Stendhal's praise of Shakespeare in a pamphlet on *Racine and Shakespeare*, published in 1823, and by the appearance of a company of English actors, including Charles Kemble and Miss Smithson,[1] in a Shakespearean repertoire at the Odéon, in 1827. The visitors succeeded, though a previous Shakespearean production, in 1822, had been hooted off the boards of the Porte Saint-Martin on the ground that Shakespeare was "aide-camp to the Duke of Wellington." The claim of the Romantics was largely a claim to be allowed to write like Shakespeare—or at least to be allowed to try to do so.

They did try, and it would be exaggerated eulogy to say that they succeeded. Dumas was the only man among them who was really by nature a dramatist, gifted with an instinctive perception of the effects which would "get over the footlights." The others were

[1] Miss Smithson married the composer Berlioz.

primarily men of letters, whose work for the theatre was a "tour de force" which they accomplished vainGloriously, in order to assert themselves. Their period of triumph was therefore of brief duration, only lasting about fifteen years, and coming to an end with the failure of Victor Hugo's *Les Burgraves* in 1843. In the meantime, however, thanks largely to the interest which Baron Taylor of the Comédie Française took in their Movement, they enjoyed their splendid hour.

Victor Hugo's preface to *Cromwell*, in 1827, was the manifesto which announced them. Of *Cromwell* itself it has been said that it contains twelve thousand lines, and can only be read by six thousand men working in relays; and though that is an exaggeration, certainly the number of those who have read the whole of it is inconsiderable. The preface, however, said pretty much what all the Romantics were thinking, and therefore made its mark among them. Théophile Gautier likened its author to Moses descending from Sinai with the Tables of the Law; and it served as a trumpet-call to the battle which was to be waged in the Théâtre Français on the first night of his *Hernani*, in February 1830.

The story of that battle is an old and famous one. The author did not trust the professional *claque*, but commissioned his friends to recruit a special amateur *claque* among the enthusiasts of the studios. Gautier, who was then an art student of twenty, and, as the phrase went, a Hugolater, was appointed the leader of the recruits, and immediately went to his tailor's to order the celebrated red waistcoat as a kind of Romantic uniform. Great poet though he became, he is more famous for having worn that waistcoat at

that *première* than for anything else that he ever did; and he proved himself worthy of the confidence reposed in him. He and his supporters, yelling themselves hoarse, shouted the opposition down. *Hernani* ran for forty-five nights, and Victor Hugo was the dramatist of the hour.

He had, so to say, "got off first" in the Romantic race for fame which he was ultimately to win; but the competition was to be keen, and other competitors were for a time to outstrip him, and run in front of him. Alexandre Dumas was to do so, and so was Alfred de Vigny when he produced *Chatterton.*

Probably Vigny would never have written for the theatre at all, if it had not been for Marie Dorval. At all events he did not begin to write for it until after he had met her; and one readily imagines the romantic thoughts which may have passed through his mind as to the ideal relations between the creator and the interpreter. So he wrote *La Maréchale d'Ancre;* and though Marie Dorval did not play in it, we know that he meant her to do so. He had his manuscript bound up as a gift for her, and wrote this dedication on the fly-leaf—

"To Madame Dorval.

"This is my only means, madame, of delivering the play which I wrote for you. You wished to play it; but it is only in virtue of your talents that you are queen of your theatre, and that sovereignty, it seems, is not omnipotent in the times in which we live.

"Alfred de Vigny.

"*August* 15, 1831."

And then, after an interval, came *Chatterton;* and this time the author insisted, in the face of all opposition, that Marie Dorval should be allotted the leading rôle. Her colleagues at the Théâtre Français, which she had only lately joined, declared that the choice was "scandalous"; but Vigny was unmoved. "Scandalous or not," he said, "that is what I desire and intend. Unless I get my way, my piece and Madame Dorval will both go to the Porte Saint-Martin;" and he said the same—or pretty much the same—to the Minister of Fine Arts, and even to Louis-Philippe, who both professed to think that Mademoiselle Mars would do better in the part.

The king and the minister shrugged their shoulders and predicted failure. The green-room, coldly hostile, made things as difficult as possible, sniffed and sneered at rehearsals, anticipated a fiasco, and prepared to gloat over it. Their sympathies were with the severe and classical; and Marie Dorval seemed to them hysterical, extravagant, and melodramatic. In particular they expected her to be ridiculous in the death scene with which the drama closed.

Kitty Bell, it had been arranged, was to be the unseen witness of the marvellous boy's suicide, looking down on him through a window from the landing of a higher floor. Loving him, and now realizing that she loved him, in spite of duty, she was to come down the staircase on to the stage, running, tumbling, tripping, collapsing into a fainting fit, beside the breathless body.

That was the scene to which the envious colleagues looked forward with malignant joy. Such a thing had never been attempted at the Comédie Française before.

It was so easy for a woman who fell down-stairs—*dégringoler* was her own word for the movement—to look ridiculous. It was so unusual for a woman—or a man either, for that matter—to fall down-stairs with dignity. Amused speculation was the more rife because Marie Dorval, though she had rehearsed the effect alone, declined to rehearse it under her comrades' eyes, but obstinately reserved it for "the night." They were quite sure that, instead of being "all right on the night," it would dissolve the tragedy in inextinguishable laughter.

Yet they were wrong; for Marie Dorval was an actress of genius—and also of agility. Her later portraits exhibit her as a little more than comfortably plump; but in those days she was light, and lithe, and willowy,—"like the ostrich feather in her hat," according to the simile of Jules Sandeau. She fell without awkwardness, without sprawling, unexpectedly but inevitably, sending a sudden thrill through the awed house, and completing the triumph of a triumphant evening. The audience called her again and again before the curtain. The colleagues, converted at last, crowded round to congratulate and kiss her. It was agreed, for the moment, that she was the greatest actress, and that Alfred de Vigny was the greatest dramatist, in France.

There was one dissentient voice—that of Gustave Planche in the *Revue des Deux Mondes;* but there was a reason for that with which the dramatic demerits of *Chatterton* had nothing to do. He had himself, Sainte-Beuve tells us, aspired and pretended; and Marie Dorval, preferring Alfred de Vigny, had shown him the door. His adverse criticism, at any rate, had no

effect except to bring the editor of the magazine a challenge from one of the author's younger and more fiery admirers; and Alfred de Vigny was able to write to his friend Brizeux: "If it had not been for Kitty Bell, the lady who plays the part with such admirable genius would have been a failure at the theatre, overcome by the cabals. That is what makes me really happy."

His happiness, however, was to be of brief duration. The moment of his great triumph almost coincided with his discovery of that painful truth.

Perhaps, as Marie was unfaithful to so many, it may seem superfluous to look for a reason for her fickleness in this one instance; but one may find one, if one wishes, in one of her unconsidered confidences: not in the complaint, already quoted, that he never took her out to dinner—though that may have had something to do with it—but in the dreamy reflection, "I wonder if it would be possible for M. de Vigny to love naturally."

He certainly did not love without self-reproach, regret, and scruple; the proof of that is in a noticeable, though little noticed, passage in his *Journal d'un Poète*—

"A Tragedy on Adultery.—People have written too much about this crime, and yet they have never sounded the depths of it: the tortures of the lover, and his shame in the presence of the husband whom he has betrayed."

Those were his sentiments at the beginning of the *liaison;* and it is easy enough to believe that they

seemed unnatural to Marie Dorval. She was married, indeed; but so little. M. Merle did not matter or appear to mind. Surely her husband was amply compensated for any wrong which he had suffered by the agreeable things which her lover wrote about him in the papers. Not all his rivals troubled to give him complimentary "notices."

And then, a little farther in the same diary, we find this note—

"A Christ in an alcove. The dream of a woman who hears her lover reproach her for the pleasures which she has tasted with her lover in the presence of the cross. She suffers, and, every night, she feels as if her hands were being pierced in expiation of her fault."

The note is printed as a subject for a poem; but it also impresses one as a recollection of an experience. Marie Dorval, as a Breton, was pious enough—or perhaps one should say superstitious enough—to have some glimmering comprehension; but her superstition —or her piety—had been overlaid by a good many gallant adventures. The thought, if presented to her, must have struck her as "uncanny,"—or perhaps as unmanly, and therefore, to use her own word, unnatural. One can even imagine some voice from the gutter whispering to her that lovers who talked in that strain were not "rigolo."

She was worshipped, and she liked being worshipped—up to a point. Lamartine's view that reserve makes a more potent appeal to women than audacity was true of her within limits. When her lover, who

had begun by fearing that adultery was irreligious, ended by making a religion of adultery—and "l'ange de l'adultère" was one of Sophie Gay's names for him —she did her best to enter into the spirit of the thing, feeling, perhaps, that, now that she had seen the highest, she really ought to love it. Perhaps it was better that they should make love with solemnity, as if they were attending public worship. But the ceremonies! Those interminable ceremonies!

M. Maurice Paléologue, in "Les Grands Ecrivains Français,"—a French equivalent of our English Men of Letters Series—has gone into that branch of the subject very thoroughly; and perhaps it will be best to quote from him, and to leave the quotation untranslated. It has its psychological importance; but it would not be easy to express it becomingly in English—

"Aussi le sentiment passionné qu'il avait voué à Madame Dorval était-il empreint d'une ardeur toute religieuse. Il voulait que l'amour fût 'une confession et une communion perpétuelle.' Au moment qu'il s'approchait de sa maîtresse, il entrait en état d'oraison. Les apprêts du sacrifice étaient pleins de charme et de poésie, mais solennels et interminables comme les rites des mystères antiques. Interminable était aussi l'extase finale, la *dilectio extatica* ou son âme goûtait l'ineffable jouissance de contempler sans voiles la parfaite Beauté."

Which is to say that, whereas some men "sin strongly," Alfred de Vigny's affectation was to sin solemnly, after the manner of the mystics, finding the divine incarnate in his mistress, and so confounding

the voluptuous with the devotional ; and Marie Dorval, it seems, understood at times, but at other times failed to understand. If she was a Breton and a communicant, she was also a play-actress and a loose woman ; and the emotions of her double nature alternated in her. It was the Breton that spoke when she stood in ecstasy before Canova's Magdalen.

"Ah, she is happy!" she exclaimed. "She has seen and touched the beautiful ideal of her dream. She has wept at His feet and wiped them with her hair. Where shall one meet the divine Jesus now? There is little merit in adoring a perfect being who has a real existence. Do you think that, if I had ever met such a one, I should have been a sinner? Do you think it is my senses that carry me away? No, no; it is my hunger for something very different,—my mad desire to find the true love which is always calling and always deceiving me. Let God send us saints, and we shall be as holy as they. Give me such a memory as Magdalen carried to the wilderness and I will go to the wilderness myself, and weep for my well-beloved."

There is mysticism there—a natural mysticism artificially cultivated by a mystic lover's talk, and then, it almost appears, a little shocked by it, and harking back to the primitive belief that the essential characteristic of chastity is to be chaste. Not many mistresses, one imagines—certainly not many mistresses taken from the stage—would have gone as far with Alfred de Vigny on his strange amorous path as Marie Dorval. She followed it, after all, with but rare lapses, and not for the sake of money, for about six years.

But she could not follow it to the end. The strain of continual exaltation, whether chaste or unchaste, was too great for her. She walked—there really is no better way of putting it—with her feet in the gutter even when her head was lifted to the stars ; and the mud of the gutter was always thick and clinging She heard the gutter calling, and remembered and regretted the mad days when lovers, instead of being religious, had been "rigolo."

CHAPTER XVI

The "treachery" of Marie Dorval—Notes on the subject in Vigny's diary—Her preference for a provincial actor—Her rupture with Vigny—He writes *Colère de Samson*—His later relations with Madame de Vigny—His death.

Marie Dorval's name is not mentioned in the *Journal d'un Poète*, or at all events in the portion of it that has been published; but there are a few allusions to her, and their significance is clear to any one who reads them with an inkling of the story. Let us have them in front of us before proceeding—

"How charming to watch a truly inspired actress at her toilet in her dressing-room! Her talk, on whatever subject, is charged with ravishing exaggerations. She gets excited about trifles, screams, and laments, and laughs and sighs, and gets angry, and caresses you, all within the space of a minute. She tells you she is ill and well, and strong and weak, and gay and melancholy, and irritated; and she does not mean a word of it. She is merely impatient, like the race-horse waiting for the signal to start. She paws the ground, just as the horse does, and looks at herself in the glass, and puts on her rouge, and takes it off again. She practises the expression of her face, and tries her voice by talking loud, and tests her soul by affecting every tone and every sentiment in turn. Art and the

stage have bewildered her in anticipation; she is, as it were, intoxicated."

That was in the early days, when the writer was still stage-struck, and all his illusions were intact. Presently we see those illusions disappearing—

"When one falls in love with a woman, it is just as well to inquire, before allowing oneself to become entangled: What sort of people does she live with? What is the manner of her life? Upon the answers to those questions all one's future happiness depends."

And then, the peril to happiness having shown tself—

"PASSION.—What mysterious resemblances there are in words! Yes, love is indeed a passion, but the passion of a martyr!"

And also—

"I wonder whether this constant watchfulness which love requires is not perhaps one of the germs which work for its destruction.

"This necessity of being always, as it were, under arms, must surely end by wearing both the lovers out."

And finally, when one at least of the lovers has been worn out, and all is over for ever—

"How should one not feel the need for love?

Alfred de Vigny

[*To face p.* 138

Who has not felt as if the ground were giving way under his feet when love forsook him?

"Work is a way of forgetting things—an active way, suitable for a stout heart."

There are hints there which any novelist could pick up and piece into a story, even without help from other sources; but we have also a few of the letters, and can, without much difficulty, sift the actual facts from them. We gather from them that the jealousies, the quarrels, and the renewals of love began early and continued for several years; and we also gather from them that the poet loved an ideal, and that the real woman was very different from the ideal.

She might, and doubtless did, appear to approach the ideal at moments of theatrical exaltation; but she also had that vanity, and that keen eye to the main chance which are so often painfully shocking to the guileless admirers of women of her profession. Art, for her, meant herself in the centre of the stage; and the business of a lover, in her view, was to exert "influence" in order to place and keep her there. Alfred de Vigny, who had a little influence, did his best; but his best was not good enough to satisfy her. She lost her temper, and told him so. There was a time when she could obtain no engagement in Paris, but had to tour the provinces instead; and she said it was all his fault. He humbled himself, and went, metaphorically, on his knees to her—

"How cruel of you to accuse me—*me* of all men—of not having done enough for you in your theatre! You know what my life is—and how could I have

done more? But trust me, and you shall see presently what I will do for you.

"And, oh, I beg of you, my beautiful Marie, do not frighten me and threaten me, as you did just now. Reassure me. Promise me that things shall be as they were, and then I shall be able to think and write for you."

That was written comparatively early in the *liaison*. Already, in this respect, the actress was behaving after the way of actresses; and she never ceased to do so. The last letter discoverable before the rupture contains another reference to this standing grievance, now at last removed, though Alfred de Vigny had, by this time, grievances of his own, and other wrongs, besides undeserved reproaches to complain of. Here is the letter in which he pours out the anger of his injured heart:—

"It is absolutely necessary for me to relieve my heart by complaining. You are making me very unhappy. I cannot go on living like this. . . .

"Every one of the hours of all my days and nights of the last four years has been passed in considering how to make you happy; and your own occupation, during the whole of the time, has been to consider how you can pain me, and what new torture you can inflict upon me on the morrow. The contrast is getting to be too much for me.

"Last summer, when I was ill, and when I saw you crying because you were getting on so badly at the theatre, I knew very well what a risk I was taking in trying to save you—how many enemies and how

few friends I had, and how serious a matter failure would be for me; and yet you were then annoying and tormenting me in every possible way by your shocking familiarities with other men.

"I was very ill indeed, and yet I sat up every night to write my play for you;[1] but I could still smile when I met you, and refrain from speaking of my labours for fear lest I should appear to be making a merit of them.

"What, after all, was I doing for myself? Was it so great a glory for me to put the idea of one of my books into a play? I only did it for you, and you have forgotten it.

"You must not heap more injuries on me than my affection and my good nature can put up with; for really I don't know what use to make of my affection and my good nature in the midst of these reproaches and these continual wrangles."

By that time, it seems, Marie Dorval had already been unfaithful, and her "treason," as it has been called, had been suspected if not proved. The tone of the correspondence even suggests that she excused herself on the ground that, as Alfred de Vigny had not done as much for her advancement as she had expected, he had no right to demand that her fidelity should be unswerving. Actresses who come to the stars from the gutter are prone to argue in that fashion; and it further appears that her fancy had been temporarily captivated by a handsome "jeune premier" who had played with her during one of her

[1] It is said that Vigny fainted several times while in the throes of the composition of *Chatterton*.

provincial tours, at Rouen, and who made love, when she called upon him to do so, "naturally."

Apparently, again, she did not take her own lapse seriously, or expect her lover to do so either. She had indulged, not a passion, but a whim, and would have been quite content that the "amant en titre" should slap her, and tell her to behave better in future. Only that was not Alfred de Vigny's way.

He had mistaken his actress, but he was sincere in his mistake. Love had been for him a religion as well as an indulgence. In loving Marie Dorval, he had made his gambler's throw for happiness, and staked his all on it; and when he found her out, he felt that it was the hollowness of life itself that had been exposed. For a time he pretended not to know, and was ridiculous. Unable to pretend any longer, he once or twice forgave, though with, as he says, "a secret shame," imploring his mistress to be "very sweet" when she came back from the country. But, in the end, he mustered his courage, accepted the inevitable, and said good-bye, not to Marie Dorval only, but also to his illusions—the first of those whose lives were wrecked by women in the "fatal year" of the Romantic Movement.

Two or three years later we find him still remembering. A common friend, Pauline Duchabge, the pianist, had found her position embarrassing in consequence of the rupture, and Vigny felicitated her on having shown "great tact in circumstances of great gravity," adding—

"Forgive me if I decline to say anything more about the matter, or to reopen my wounds in order to

write to you with my blood. I have often reproached myself for the confidences with which I overwhelmed you. You shall be free from them henceforth, so please forget any expressions of undue violence which I may have used."

Clearly he had not forgotten when he wrote that, and, in truth, he never forgot, though Marie Dorval expected him either to do so, or return to her. She gave him his chance in 1841, by writing to ask him once more to help her at the theatre with his advice and influence ; and he replied with perfect politeness, and even with friendliness. He would do what he could, but he could do but little. He had conceived a "repugnance for the theatre," and it was out of the question that he could write another *Chatterton* for her. Or at all events he could not do so "quite immediately," though no one desired more heartily than he did to hear of her success in her profession.

No more than that—and no less ; and while he wrote that, there was lying in his desk the last of the poems which Marie Dorval inspired—that terrible *Colère de Samson* in which he summed up in vitriolic language his new, but enduring hatred and contempt for the ruses and wiles of women :—

"Une lutte éternelle en tout temps, en tout lieu,
Se livre sur la terre, en présence de Dieu,
Entre la bonté d'Homme et la ruse de Femme,
Car la femme est un être impur de corps et d'âme."

And then—

"Toujours voir serpenter la vipère dorée
Qui se traîne en sa fange et s'y croit ignorée ;
Toujours ce compagnon dont le coeur n'est pas sûr,
La Femme, enfant malade et douze fois impur."

And then again—

"Terre et ciel! punissez par de telles justices
La trahison ourdie en des amours factices,
Et la délation du secret de nos coeurs
Arraché dans nos bras par des baisers menteurs."

The lines were written at Shavington, in England, in 1839, but remained unpublished till long afterwards. Presumably Vigny did not wish Marie Dorval to know that he still suffered, and to exult over his sufferings to Jules Sandeau, whose turn it now was to satisfy her craving for the love and homage of literary men. It is said that she loved Jules Sandeau well enough, for a little while, to be jealous of his lingering regard for George Sand, and even to attempt to stab herself—though only with a blunt paper-knife—in some fit of annoyance at his levity; but that need not concern us. It is also said that her heart ultimately went back to Vigny, and that she took to frequenting churches and graveyards, and reading the *Imitatio Christi* for his sake; but that is as it may be, for actresses—and actors too for that matter—are apt to be fond of acting even in their private lives, and to make a very emphatic and conspicuous display of very small emotions.

Vigny, on his part, neither forgot, nor recovered from the blow, though he still had nearly five-and-twenty years to live. It sterilized his genius, so that, for many years, he hardly wrote anything; and he did not venture to seek his happiness in the same way a second time, but withdrew to the "ivory tower" of his reserve, and to his country seat, and to the society

of his English wife, who still had a difficulty in conversing with him in French.

His friends said that he was the most reserved man whom they knew. "No one," it was remarked, "was ever intimate with him; he was not even intimate with himself." But he was also a most devoted husband, and his devotion increased when his wife became an invalid, in spite of the fact that the expectations for which he had married her only resulted in irritating and unsuccessful lawsuits. His courtesy, we further read, was constant, ceremonious, and old-fashioned. When Madame de Vigny entered the room, he never failed to rise, and kiss her hand, and conduct her, like a courtier, to her seat. And she, on her part, neither raged nor was peevish because she had been neglected in the past, nor showed any indecent exultation over the failure of her husband's long infidelity.

"It's a long time since you saw Madame Dorval, isn't it?" she asked him once—but only once, and only just to show that she was not so blind as he appeared to have supposed, and to demonstrate the value of her serene and comfortable temper.

And so the time passed, and they grew old together calmly until incurable illnesses[1] overtook them and they died, within a brief time of each other, in the sixties, long after the fever of the Romantic Movement had spent itself, and its deliriums had passed into history.

[1] Vigny died of cancer.

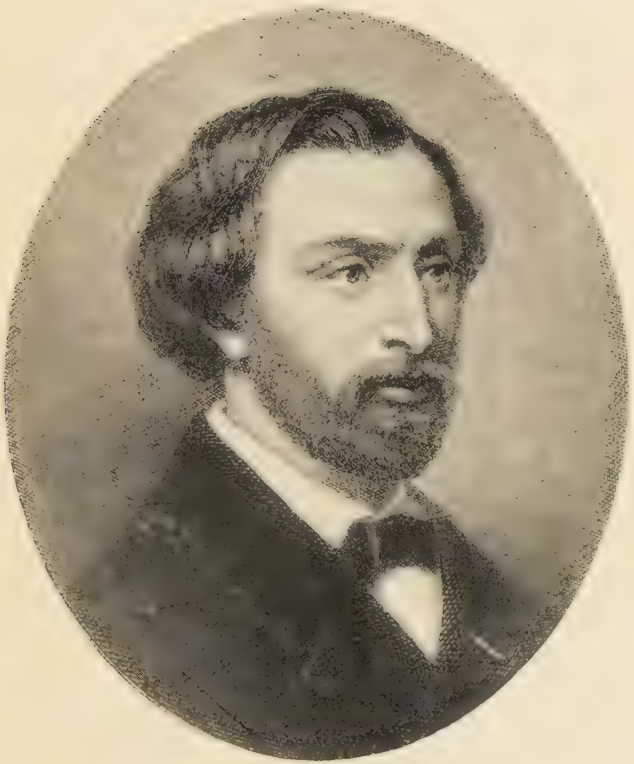
CHAPTER XVII

The fatal year of the Romantic Movement—Alfred de Musset and George Sand—Their honeymoon at Venice—Their estrangement—Princess Belgiojoso—Musset's intimacy with her—The game of hide-and-seek—The caricature—The quarrel.

The year in which Marie Dorval caught Alfred de Vigny in the toils has already been spoken of as the "fatal year" of the Romantic Movement. It is the date of the crisis of the most passionate of Sainte-Beuve's passions, and it is also the date of the famous expedition of George Sand and Alfred de Musset to Venice. Sainte-Beuve's story may wait while a passing word is said about Musset's most unfortunate experience.

He had been warned, albeit in no puritanical spirit, by his devoted friend, Alfred Tattet, a stockbroker, who was also a man of culture addicted to gallantry. Tattet was himself contemplating a trip to Venice at the time, with Mademoiselle Déjazet, the famous actress, for his companion; but he insisted, speaking like a man of the world, that his case and Musset's were widely different.

"Stockbrokers," he said, "are different from poets, and actresses are different from novelists. I know Déjazet, and I know myself. In our case it is a mere passing caprice which we have chosen to indulge; in



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your case—you cannot deny it—it is a passion which has got you in its grip. I fear its consequences. Mark my words, for you are going to suffer."

Tattet was right, and the story of Musset's sufferings is well known. It is told at length in *George Sand and her Lovers;* so that the briefest outline of the catastrophe may here suffice.

Musset fell ill, and there seems no reason to doubt that his illness was delirium tremens. George Sand had to send for the doctor, and she selected the handsome young Dr. Pagello, who had already acquired a habit of admiring her from the street when she was taking the air on the balcony. Pagello was a skilful physician, and George Sand was a devoted nurse. From those points of view Musset had nothing to complain of; but when he recovered, he found that his medical attendant had supplanted him in the affections of his mistress.

They told him what happened, and sent him home, while they remained at Venice and set up housekeeping together. Apparently he was too ill to be violently and righteously indignant. Certainly he continued to be passionately and morbidly in love. He wrote love-letters from various halting-places on his journey, and he wrote other love-letters after his arrival in Paris. George Sand, on her part, though she preferred Pagello to him, did not propose that he should pass altogether out of her life. Soaked, as it seems, in Rousseau's *Confessions*, she aspired to take Madame de Warens for her model, and divide her favours between two men, not as a caprice, but as a religion, with the fervour of mystical intensity. She

told Pagello—and told him to tell Musset—that the three of them were united by "a sublime tie incomprehensible to the rest of the world."

They were not so united, and they could not be. One hears of such unions in mystical communities—among St. Simonians and Mormons, for example; but George Sand was only half a mystic though she talked the language of mysticism, and her lovers, though they tried to learn the language from her, were not mystics at all. Pagello was only a general practitioner sowing his wild oats. Musset was an aristocrat, with most of the ideas of his class and a sense of humour which blind passion and disgust at his own behaviour had only temporarily obscured. So that the mystical triple *entente* was clearly doomed to speedy dissolution.

The men were jealous of each other, and George Sand soon found that she was tired of both of them. She dragged Pagello to Paris—he had to sell his valuables in order to pay his fare—and then, finding that the provincial physician cut a comic figure in Paris, she told him to go back to Venice. He went, and she was reconciled to Musset—for a little while. Finally, after many violent scenes and bitter recriminations, she withdrew to her country house in Nohant, and Musset—apparently somewhat to her surprise—made no attempt to follow her. He had heard, he wrote to a common friend, that she did not wish to see him. "I need not add," he continued, "that, if that were the case, I should respect her wishes;" and perhaps one may find the explanation of his retreat in the title of one of his later comedies, *Il faut q'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée.* One may read the story—his version of it, at all events—in his *Confes-*

sion d'un enfant du siècle, which Buloz published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

Buloz, it was currently said, had brought the two romantics together, in the confident hope that they would fall in love, and quarrel, and so "make copy" for his periodical. It was the sort of thing that Buloz was eminently capable of doing, and if he did it, he certainly reaped his reward, gathering in the full harvest at a later date, when George Sand sent him the manuscript of *Elle et Lui*.

The rest of George Sand's career—her subsequent affairs with Michel de Bourges and Chopin and the rest—having been told elsewhere need not be repeated here. The later adventures of her lover, however, are less well known; and even though their connection with the Romantic Movement is not very intimate, a little space may be devoted to them.

"My George! My first love, and my last!" he was still writing six months after he had been sent away, as it were in disgrace, from Venice; but, of course, she was neither the one nor the other. The admission, for those who can read between the lines, is in the familiar stanza, addressed to George Sand herself—

> "Te voilà revenu dans mes nuits étoilées,
> Bel ange, aux yeux d'azur, aux paupières voilées,
> Amour, mon bien suprême, et que j'avais perdu!
> J'ai cru pendant trois ans te vaincre et te maudire,
> Et toi, les yeux en pleurs, avec ton doux sourire,
> Au chevet de mon lit, te voilà revenu."

Love, that is to say, has revisited the poet,—but in a new incarnation. George Sand has consoled him for the loss, mourned for three years, of a Madame

Groisellier, of whom nothing, beyond the fact that she was untrue to him, appears to be known or knowable. The consolation, in that case, was, for a few weeks, complete; and there is every reason for thinking that the subsequent consolations were only partial. The heart which Madame Groisellier had merely troubled, George Sand had devastated. She had found it still somewhat naïve, and had left it *blasé* and without illusions. Yet it is not because a man has lost his illusions that he will never love, or try to love, again. Love is a habit, like inebriety. Musset had both habits, and he indulged them both, although they sometimes clashed. It is possible—it is even probable—that love sometimes kept him sober. It is certain that his success in love was impaired by his growing passion for strong drink.

But not at first, and certainly not in the little affair with Princess Belgiojoso.

The princess was an Italian,—very beautiful, and also, in some respects, very serious, in spite of her addiction to the characteristic levities of her period.

She was serious as a conspirator in the cause of Italian independence and as a pamphleteer in the cause of the Catholic faith. Her essay on *The Formation of the Catholic Dogma* is described by Sainte-Beuve as "a precious curiosity seeing that it is the work of an Italian of loose morality"; but she was also notorious for her success in seducing other women's lovers from their allegiance.

"The Belgiojoso," wrote Balzac to Madame Hanska, in 1844, "has taken Liszt away from Madame d'Agoult, just as she previously took Lord Normanby

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away from his wife, Mignet from Madame d'Aubernon, and Musset from George Sand;" and that though she was "a horrible blue-stocking" who received her visitors "with ink-stains on her dressing-gown."

This is gossip, of course, laid at the feet of a woman who was a great deal too fond of gossip; and the part of it which relates to George Sand and Alfred de Musset is not precisely true. Their separation was inevitable, for reasons already explained, whether the princess intervened or not. What is true is that she was the first of the women who, finding Musset in despondency, essayed the task of consolation.

She was quite serious about it, for she was always serious in all her love affairs. One of her quarrels with one of her lovers—the Mignet already mentioned—was composed, at her wish, at the foot of the altar; she insisted that they should attend Mass and receive communion together as a preliminary to the renewal of their fond relations: a story which one feels bound to tell on account of the light which it sheds upon her character. And similarly, when Musset began to pay his addresses to her, she took an elevated tone with him. He was a libertine—or passed for such—and she was a sentimentalist, and therefore—

"The punishment for vulgar passions," she said, "is that those who indulge in them are forbidden to aspire to noble love;" but Musset's answer to that was an invitation to lunch with him in a *cabinet particulier* in an out-of-the-way restaurant at Montparnasse—and she accepted it, and was very nearly caught *in flagranti delicto* by her husband, who happened to repair to the same place on the same errand, at the same hour of the same day, with the wife of one of his

friends, and who, hearing Musset's voice, though not, happily, that of his companion, sent up the waiter with a proposal that they should share a private room and make up a merry party of four.

That is one of the few stories of the intimacy which biographers have preserved. Another shows Musset cunningly establishing himself as a guest in the villa which Mignet had taken for the princess at Versailles. He came to call; they played hide-and-seek together in the garden; and he pretended to sprain his ankle, so as to be invited to remain. He did remain; but the princess quarrelled with him, and inflicted a cruel punishment. He coughed, and she sent him to bed, promising to apply a plaster to his chest. She did apply it; but it was a plaster of pins, and it cured the patient so effectively that he jumped out of bed, called for his hat and stick, and departed in a huff.

An intrigue punctuated by such incidents as that cannot, it is clear, be taken very seriously; and the end of it was in fact worthy of the beginning and the middle. Princess Belgiojoso was, as has been said, serious in religion and politics; but her conduct in love was that of a petulant and wayward child, and the day came when she lost her temper.

Musset, as is well known, had gifts as a caricaturist as well as a poet. The princess was proud of the classical regularity of her features, and maintained that persons of that particular type of beauty could not be caricatured. Musset denied it, and the princess challenged him to try. He tried—and he succeeded. Her eyes, as it happened, were just a shade too large—and he drew them a great deal too large. The caricature was a speaking likeness; the speaking

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likeness was a caricature. The company—for company was present—laughed ; Princess Belgiojoso lost her temper ; and that was the beginning of the end. The actual end is reported in Musset's letter to Madame Jaubert.

He had written, one gathers, to apologize, or at all events to explain that he had meant no harm. The reply which he had received had been "really worth putting in a book." He had, at first, wept over it "like a child that is having its face washed." Then he had "eaten four fried eggs," pulled himself together, and formed his resolution—

"The Devil take these games of love ; they are worse than games of chance. Confound it! How they do hurt!

"So, seriously :

"I shall abstain henceforward from all correspondence and all relations whatsoever with Her Serene Highness ; and nothing shall ever induce me to *play with her again.*"

It is an angry letter, no doubt ; but it strikes the new note—the note of the "Musset after George Sand." The writer has learnt—the one great disillusion of his life has taught him—to stand outside himself, and make a mock of his own most sacred feelings. He has lost his illusions, and has no more illusions to lose ; but he has gained, if it be a gain, the power of irony ; and his future is easily predicted.

He will love again, feeling that there is no more pleasant way of putting in the time, but with impunity —staking little, and hardly risking the little that he

stakes : as safe as the fencer who fights for exercise, or for the fun of the thing, with buttons on the foils, and with his mask and leather jerkin to protect him.

That, one cannot but feel, was what was bound to happen in Musset's case ; and that is what we shall now see happening.[1]

[1] The affair with the Princess was preceded by the affair with Mlle. Aimée d'Alton, who, long afterwards, at the age of fifty, married Paul de Musset. Unfortunately, the letters from which alone the story could be told were not taken from the sealed packet in which they were preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale until this volume was passing through the press. They have since been published, with an introduction by M. Léon Séché, by the Société du Mercure de France. The *liaison* lasted for about two years, and then came to an end without any passionate incident.

CHAPTER XVIII

Rachel—Musset champions her against Jules Janin—Rachel's character—Her social opportunities and her neglect of them—her *liaison* with Musset—Madame Allan-Déspréaux—She plays in Musset's comedy—She resists him—She yields to him—Madame de Musset implores her to reclaim her son from his vices—She tries but fails—Musset's housekeeper's opinion of her—Quarrel and estrangement.

One of the women who helped Musset, as we have expressed it, to "put in the time," was the illustrious tragédienne Rachel. Her name gives the story more interest than belongs to it through its intrinsic merits; and yet it is, in a way, what one calls "characteristic": characteristic of the period no less than of the persons involved.

Musset "discovered" Rachel, a few days after her début at the Comédie, when her fortunes still hung in the balance; and he took her part, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, against Jules Janin of the *Débats*, who had begun by writing her up and was proceeding to write her down. Janin, it seems—a *faux bonhomme*, a clever journalist but very far from a gentleman—had aspired to "favours" which were not accorded to him, and had chosen this means of demonstrating that he was a man whom it was worth an actress's while to propitiate. His attack on Rachel soon included an attack upon her champion. "It was absurd," he said, "that a third-rate poet should set himself up as a

dramatic critic. The experiment reminded him of the story of the old man who picked up a violin, saying that he did not know whether he could play it, but he would try." Whereupon the "third-rate poet," much in wrath, dispatched him the following letter :—

"Sir,

"I expressed, with courteous sincerity, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, my opinion of Mlle. Rachel. I said nothing about you in my article, but you have published a reply which is immoderate in language and in bad taste. Your review is a coarse and unmannerly piece of work. In your character of man of letters, you are a child who ought to be muzzled. Personally you are a buffoon who ought to be refused admission to the Théâtre Français. You can avenge yourself for this letter, if you like, with further insults. I quite expect you to do so, and I view the prospect with indifference.

"Alfred de Musset."

It all seems a storm in a tea-cup—a ridiculous fuss to make over the question whether a particular actress was, or was not, at her best in a particular part ; but the French, as we are constantly being reminded, take the theatre more seriously than we do—and that is one of the ways in which they are serious about it. Nor did Rachel's champion go unrewarded. She invited him to supper ; she invited him to visit her in her villa at Montmorency, where, he says, "she looked perfectly charming, running about *her* garden with her feet in *my* slippers." She also asked the inevitable question : "Why don't you write a play with a good

part for me?"—a task which every actress everywhere appears to regard as the noblest that a man of genius can undertake. And the rest of the story, as any reader will readily guess, is merely to the effect that she was unfaithful, and that he did not care.

If Rachel was sublime on the stage, she was also sublime, in her private life, in the character of a mercenary Messalina. She once informed a confidante, who passed the confidence on, that she could not remember a time when she was still possessed of her virginity. She openly boasted that she had never "belonged" to any man, meaning thereby, not that she took no man's money, but that she preferred to receive money from several men simultaneously.

Society gave her her chance. She looked innocent, and society affected to believe that she was nearly as innocent as she looked. She was summoned to Madame Récamier's salon, to receive the compliments of the Archbishop of Paris. Count Walewski, Napoleon's natural son, not only was in love with her, but had some idea of marrying her, until he found her out, and heard that she went about saying, "Le comte m'ennuie, avec son comme-il-faut." And what Walewski did not find out for himself was found out for him by one of his rivals, Dr. Véron of the *Constitutionnel.*

Véron suspected that Rachel's affectionate letters to him were insincere; and, as his position as an editor gave him influence in high quarters, he requested the police to observe her movements and let him know what they discovered. They discovered that the illustrious actress had three different apartments in three different quarters of the town, and received separate lovers—or groups of lovers—in each of them,

each on his special day of the week or month. The doctor certainly did not act like a gentleman in reading this report aloud to a party of his friends at the luncheon-table; but, even so, Rachel's amazed cry of horror and indignation, which is to be found in the *Revue des Autographes*, strikes one as a little exaggerated.

"I am going away," she wrote. "A contemptible wretch has insulted me, and all is over for me. I have not the courage to take my own life, and yet despair is in my soul. There is no longer any God for me. I do not believe in Him any more. It is Society that is dealing me my death-blow. Presently, it may be, God will know the secrets of my heart. I have been foolish, but I have never belonged to any man."

Which means, in the first place, that the Faubourg Saint-Germain, having heard Dr. Véron's story, has dropped Rachel like a hot potato, and in the second place, that her infidelity to Véron, in spite of his bank-notes, ought, in her opinion, to be interpreted as a proof of the independence of her character; and when we have read the letter, with a knowledge of the circumstances in which it was written, we feel that we know the woman, and that we are entitled to say of her, as of Marie Dorval, but more emphatically, that her feet were in the gutter even while her sublime head smote the stars. For Marie Dorval at least had her ideals, though she fell away from them in the hour of trial and temptation; whereas Rachel, combining greed with genius, had none.

Only, of course, she left no such mark on Alfred

RACHEL

de Musset's life as Marie Dorval had left on the life of Alfred de Vigny. Little harm can be done, and no hearts can be broken, by such unblushingly venal women. The really dangerous women are those who are capable of sentiment as well as of caprice; and no enthusiast can ever have included Rachel in that category.

Musset certainly did not, and, as certainly did not take her seriously. She was *canaille*, but she amused him—that is the conclusion of the matter. He and she indulged a caprice together, after the example of Alfred Tattet and Déjazet. Nothing happened to disturb his view, durably impressed upon him by George Sand's conduct, that every woman was a grisette at heart. The end of the interlude was of as little consequence as the interlude itself. There were other women at other theatres equally amiable and Musset was a convert to Tattet's opinion that a man ran less danger with actresses than with women novelists.

The next actress—the next who matters—on his list was Madame Allan-Déspréaux.

Like Marie Dorval, she was the child of strolling players. Her father, whose name was Ross, was, at the time of her birth, the manager of the theatre at Mons in Belgium. Déspréaux was her mother's name; and as Talma one day told her that Déspréaux was, for the purposes of playbills, a better name than Ross, she adopted it. She took a first prize for comedy at the Conservatoire, made her début at the Comédie Française, left it for the Gymnase, took a long engagement at the French theatre at St.

Petersburg, returned to Paris when the forties were well advanced, and created the leading part in *Le Caprice*—the first play of Musset's which the Comédie accepted.

Her reputation was very different from that of Rachel. Many admirers, indeed, had made advances, but all their overtures had been rejected. Louise Déspréaux was, as people say, "good." She preferred to marry in her own station of life and live as quietly as a Bohemian may. Her husband, M. Allan, was an actor, who played with her, both in France and in Russia. She married him at the age of twenty-two, and she was still living with him, unassailed by scandals, at the age of thirty-four. When she returned to Paris, however, M. Allan, for whatever reason, remained in Russia; and presently she met Musset,—first professionally, in connection with the production of his piece, and afterwards on terms of personal friendship.

Even so, however, there was no immediate handle for gossip to lay hold of. Madame Allan had neither the morals, nor even the manners, of the *coulisses*. Providence had given her virtue, and St. Petersburg had given her tone. Princesses had "received" her in the Russian capital, and she comported herself accordingly, with an imitation of the grand style which was almost second nature, and only remotely suggestive of the limelight. Her letters, too, show her to have been a woman of intelligence and even of culture, and one who, in spite of her profession, took life soberly. She inspired respect, in short, and Alfred de Musset appeared to be afraid of her. It is said that he blushed like a girl when she played

the piano and asked him to turn over the music for her. And she, on her part, had confidence in herself and her discretion.

"Be careful, Louise," said her friend Madame Samson-Toussaint.

"There is no danger, my dear," she replied. "I am very much flattered by his attentions, but I know his reputation."

His reputation, she meant, was that of a man who took no women seriously; and as it was no part of her scheme of life to be any man's light o' love, she considered that she could play with fire with impunity, and without any risk of being burnt. Seeing that she had remained virtuous until the age of thirty-eight, there was plausibility in the expectation. But thirty-eight is a romantic age; and so a few months later, her friend, whom she had seen off at Havre, on her way to Brazil, received a long letter from her.

"Dear child," Madame Allan then wrote, "you were quite right in your presentiments," and she added that the crisis had developed with "terrible rapidity," and that she thought that the details might interest her correspondent.

Musset had been ill—he was frequently ill, and his illnesses were generally the result of his potations. He had written a letter attributing his malady to his failure to win the love of Madame Allan. He had met her at the theatre and escorted her home, repeating his protestations, insisting that her cruelty had not only made him ill, but had driven him to the bottle.

"I had some evidence of that," she continued; "and as, with all his faults, he is not a liar, I believed

him. He convinced me of his attachment, and also of his respect. That touched me; but I resisted and was reluctant. Things had reached such a pass, however, that I had to answer definitely 'Yes' or 'No.' It took me a whole day to screw up my courage to the point of saying 'No,' for I could not say it without regret, in spite of my many reasons for declining to yield to him. Finally, doubting whether I had the courage to say 'No' in my own house, I wrote to tell him to come to my dressing-room in the course of the second act."

He came, having misunderstood the letter, supposing that the fortress was about to yield, and that he had only been summoned to receive the surrender of the garrison. Undeceived, as he had to be, he regarded Madame Allan as "a cold-hearted coquette" whose conduct was in painful contrast with his own serious and lasting affection"; and Madame Allan could not bear the thought of that. Her head "was now completely turned." "I envisaged the situation," she said, "and, by the aid of sophisms, persuaded myself that I was free." So she wrote a penitent note, and took it to his door with her own hands, and then—

"He returned to me, and at last I gave myself to him freely, obeying my irresistible desire to do so, and yet, at the same time, with feelings of profound melancholy. Make what you can of that."

What Madame Samson-Toussaint made of it was no doubt: "I told you so;" and the good reasons for her melancholy vaticinations were not long in

becoming visible. The first quarrel followed hard on the heels of the first embrace. There were scenes of jealousy—about nothing. Musset went away, and disappeared. For four days no one knew what had become of him ; and then it was, of all persons in the world, Alfred de Musset's mother who came to the rescue and made the peace between him and his mistress.

She was a characteristically French mother, hampered by no altruistic puritanism, though her own life had always been above reproach. She knew the ways of young men in general, and of her own son in particular. Experience had proved to her that, in his case, one must not hope for the best, but only for the second best. Ideals of bourgeois respectability were not for him. If this habit of running after women were a vice, it was at any rate a vice through which he might perhaps be saved from other weaknesses. So she had argued when she had let him go to Venice with George Sand ; and so she argued now—and with rather more reason on her side. Madame Allan was, for an actress, a very serious and responsible person. She might not be an ideal missionary, but she was a missionary to whom Alfred seemed disposed to listen.

The two women met on the doorstep of Alfred's apartment. Madame de Musset, white-haired, venerable, and seventy-two, got into the actress's carriage, and pleaded with her, "excusing herself with the tact of a woman of fashion, and telling me how happy she was that I should love the son whom she adored."

"Save him," she said. "You can. He loves you

well enough for that. He had abandoned his bad habits, and only resumed them because of you. . . . I will let you know the moment that he returns, even if it is in the middle of the night."

He did return, as was his habit after all his absences, and perhaps it is to this date that belongs a striking scene described in the recollections of "Alfred de Musset *intime*," written by his housekeeper, Mademoiselle Colin.

Musset was ill, and his housekeeper, in order to nurse him, had made up a truckle bed in his room.

"I had promised myself a good night's rest," she says, "and I needed it; but presently an unexpected visitor knocked at the door. It was Madame Allan who had come, accompanied by her maid, to nurse the poet. The amount of luggage which they had brought with them showed me that they intended to make a long stay. The actress quickly assumed a toilette which was more than *négligée*, and announced her intention of sleeping on the bed which I had improvised for myself. I had to go out and get some dinner for her, and then I had to sleep on the sofa in the drawing-room. I passed a very bad night there, instead of the good night which I had expected; and it seemed to me very hard indeed that I should be required to wait upon Madame as well as attending to Monsieur."

It seemed so hard that she wrote to Madame de Musset to complain, only to be told, however, that she had better do as M. Alfred wished. And then—to return to Madame Allan's confession—

Madame Allan-Despréaux

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"I have taken—or I should say *we* have taken—a country-house at Ville d'Avray, where I have been 'resting' for the last four days. I told no one where I was going, and I expect to be buried alive here for the next six weeks. Do people know? I haven't the least idea. All I can say is that I am not publishing it on the housetops. No doubt it will come to be known in time; but you may rely upon us to comport ourselves with decorum."

Left to herself, Madame Allan assuredly would never have comported herself otherwise than with decorum. She was neither fickle nor frivolous, and she had not the least wish to advertise her conquest, or make a scandal. Romance and the higher life—that was all she wanted; and such news as reached her of her husband's proceedings at St. Petersburg gave her a fair excuse for wanting it. But Musset wanted to alternate the higher life with bouts of drunkenness and debauchery; and when he was drunk, he made scenes, and was jealous of everything and nothing; and Madame Allan had to threaten, though without meaning to fulfil her threat, that she would never speak to him again.

In one such jealous fit he refused to present his brother Paul to her on the ground that, if he did, she would probably make love to him. In another, he insisted that his housekeeper should accompany her when she went to the bank to cash a cheque—fearing, apparently, that, if left unchaperoned, she would make love to the cashier. She put up with that, and with a good deal more than that, forgiving him repeatedly when he came to her, sober and penitent, and begged

her pardon. Evidently she loved him, and would have saved him from himself if George Sand had not put it out of the power of any woman to do so. Madame de Musset's confidence in her was justified; and her letters are really bitter cries, extorted from the agony of her heart.

She found two men in him, she wrote: the adoring and adorable lover, and the libertine who could not free himself from the indelible traces of his disorderly past. He could be gentle and affectionate, and an artist to the finger-tips; but he could also be a brute and a blasphemer, regaling her with a "procession of memories, very bitter to listen to, the reminiscences, to put it fairly, of a debauchee." So that, at the end, we find her crying out despairingly—

"I am trying, little by little, to cure myself of sentiment and passion, for I see to what they lead. We are all, men and women alike, poor dupes, and make a great mistake in crying out that this or that is what we want. The human heart goes on its way, mocking at human reason and human arguments."

Apropos of what act of neglect she uttered that cry we can only guess; for he gave her many reasons, any one of which would have sufficed. He swore at her; he forsook her for other women; and yet it may be that the cruelest cut of all was his derision of her for getting fat—too fat for a certain part in one of his own most famous pieces. At his own theatre, when Delaunay was singing to her the familiar lyric beginning—

Si vous croyez que je vais dire
Qui j'ose aimer. . . .

he hummed and interpolated an improvised couplet :

Je l'adore, et qu'elle est ronde
Comme un tonneau !

No doubt he was drunk when he thus likened her to a beer barrel, and no doubt she knew that he was drunk ; but she seems nevertheless—and we cannot wonder—to have taken it as a sign that her reign in his heart was nearly over. She went to Algiers shortly afterwards, and took that opportunity to break off her relations with him, without giving any reason except that it was her wish to do so.

It does not appear that he cared, or that he made any effort to win her back. He had loved her, more or less, for two years ; and two years, at his age, was quite a long time. He would like to love some one else for a change ; and some one else was waiting for him in the person of Louise Colet.

CHAPTER XIX

Louise Colet—Her intimacy with Victor Cousin—Her attempt to assassinate Alphonse Karr—Her passion with Flaubert—Her affair with Alfred de Musset—His desire to break with her—She takes him by the shoulder and shakes him.

THE name of Louise Colet claims a conspicuous place in any list of the Muses of the Romantic Movement. Her writings are now dead, though her reputation lives; but there was a time when men of letters spoke of her as "the tenth Muse" and wrote her letters beginning: "My dear Sapho."

She came from Lyons, where she was born in 1810, and where she had made a reputation by contributing to the poets' corners of provincial newspapers. A young musician—a *premier prix de Rome*—who had set some of her lines to music, met her, fell in love with her, married her, and took her to Paris. He was an excellent man who succeeded in life, becoming a professor at the Conservatoire; but he and his wife soon quarrelled and lived apart, so that M. Colet has no further connection with the story. His importance is merely that he launched the poetess in Parisian society.

Her introductions were good. She had some talent, and she was also beautiful, with eloquent blue eyes and luxuriant black hair. Some one presented her in Madame Récamier's salon; and she maintained

her footing there, and soon came to receive many of the habitués of the Abbaye-aux-bois in a literary salon of her own. Most of her literary contemporaries of the forties and early fifties knew her; and one of them —Flaubert's friend, Maxime Du Camp—suggested an epitaph for her which sums up the leading incidents in her career with sufficient exactitude to be quoted—

HERE LIES SHE WHO
COMPROMISED VICTOR COUSIN,
MADE ALFRED DE MUSSET RIDICULOUS,
CALUMNIATED GUSTAVE FLAUBERT, AND
TRIED TO ASSASSINATE ALPHONSE KARR.
REQUIESCAT IN PACE.

It is not flattering; but it is, roughly speaking, true. Some of the names essential to Madame Colet's complete biography—the name, for instance, of Chateaubriand's biographer, Villemain, and of the rich pharmaceutical chemist who paid for the production of twenty-five copies of an *édition de luxe* of her poetical works—are omitted in the summary; but the omissions need not concern us, and we may rapidly run over the other stories.

Victor Cousin was, of course, the eminent philosopher whom the works of reference describe as "the prophet of electicism." His alliance with Louise Colet dates from 1838, when he was forty-six and she was eight-and-twenty; and his great merit in her eyes would seem to have been his influence in determining the award of the literary prizes in the gift of the Academy. So she permitted, or perhaps invited, him to embrace her, with the double result that she won a prize and bore a daughter. It was not in itself, perhaps, a very startling, or a very compromising coincidence; but it happened that Alphonse Karr—

not yet "the first gardener of France," but only a clever young man, pushing his way in journalism—got hold of the story and made fun of it.

He had no title to do so—certainly he was not himself a man of impeccable virtue. He lived apart from his wife, and we shall encounter his name presently in the list of the gallants who preceded Victor Hugo, in the favours of the lady, originally venal, though ultimately sublime, whom the author of *Notre-Dame de Paris* adopted as his Muse and imposed in that character upon an idolatrous world. He was more of a journalist than of a gentleman, and he wanted copy for *Les Guêpes:* a satirical periodical, something like *Truth*, something like *Modern Society*, something like *Punch*, but too French to be really like anything English whatsoever. This scandal gave him what he wanted; with the result that the tenth Muse, now in the ninth month of her pregnancy, picked up the weapon that lay nearest to her—a carving knife with a black handle—and set out to call on him.

He received her in his dressing-gown, and disarmed her without removing his cigarette from his lips; and he kept the carving knife, and hung it up on the wall of his study, with the inscription: "A present from Louise Colet." The story is told in Larousse's admirable encyclopaedic Dictionary; and it is somewhat less than tragic. One can understand, however, that it compromised Victor Cousin in the eyes of persons who considered that philosophers ought to confine themselves to philosophy; and it certainly throws light upon the temper and disposition of the lady.

She was as intense as she was beautiful, as

passionate as she was inspired. Her dramatic genius —she tried to write for the stage, and Victor Cousin got one of her pieces produced—manifested itself in "scenes," of which Alphonse Karr was by no means the only victim. Sainte-Beuve was another.

Her visit to him was due to his refusal either to write a preface to her poetical works, or to review them. "You must permit me," he had written, "to admire you in silence, without being required to explain to the public the precise point at which my admiration of you ceases. It is a modest request, and I cannot believe that you will insist." But Madame Colet did insist, and called upon the critic for the purpose of doing so. History does not relate whether she carried a carving knife on that occasion or not; but Sainte-Beuve feared that she might be carrying one, and, as a precautionary measure, slammed the door in her face.

So far, so good. The next phase in her life began when she made the acquaintance of Flaubert.

Louise Colet met Flaubert in Pradier's studio. She was then thirty-six, and he was twenty-five—a handsome Norman giant, dreaming of literary glory, but a little provincial in his manners, and needing to be "formed." "Sapho, you should form him," said the sculptor; and Sapho promised with alacrity, for she had reached the age at which women tire of elderly protectors, and prefer the more exuberant embraces of the young. As a Muse, of course, she could teach him very little; but as a mistress she could teach him a great deal.

She tried. The course was of six years duration.

Most of the correspondence has been published, so that the curious can follow the vicissitudes of the story. The essence of it—for the details are irrelevant to our purpose—is that here was a woman, vehement in her emotions and insatiable in her desires, throwing herself at the head of a man whom his friends describe as having been "by nature chaste."

It was a novel experience for him, and at first he was delighted with it. "How can I help loving you?" he writes. "You are so gentle, so good, so clever, so affectionate, so beautiful." "I have no choice but to love you," he vows in another letter. "Your love is a thing that would bring the dead to life." And also: "If ever I write my Memoirs, you shall have a place in them; and what a place!"

What a place, indeed! The place of a woman who first took his heart by storm, and then tired of him, but still clung to him!

She was on with the new love before she was off with the old; and, in the early days of the attachment, she used to send him Victor Cousin's letters to read. The fascination was such that he thought it not only a proper, but a charming thing for her to do.

"So many thanks," he wrote, "for the philosopher's letter. I understand why you sent it. It is a further act of homage, a further sacrifice. My poor angel wants to give me everything: her glory, her poetry, her heart—and the love of the men who desire her."

She told him, too, about her quarrel with Sainte-Beuve; and the story of the slammed door roused him

to indignation. She had only to speak the word, he said, and he would box Sainte-Beuve's ears or kick him down the stairs as she preferred. It would be an easy commission, and he would undertake it gladly. But she did not press the point; and the time soon came when her lover's devotion began to relax.

It was the old story of the difference between the man who proposes to love in moderation, and the woman who insists on loving in excess. Flaubert was wedded to his art, and Louise Colet wanted to monopolize his thoughts, his time, his energies. She summoned him from Rouen to Paris, and rushed to Mantes to meet him, and "kept the whole inn awake with her cries of passion," at times when he would have preferred to stay at Rouen and get on with *Madame Bovary;* and he began to take as much trouble to avoid her as he had previously taken to seek her out. There are stories of his driving through Paris with the carriage blinds drawn down, in the hope that she might not see him. There are also stories of her pursuing him to restaurants, bursting in upon bachelor dinner-parties, and dragging him away in triumph amid the derisive laughter of his friends. One can imagine that he was not altogether grieved when, finding that he did not fill her life as of old, she gave him a rival in the person of Alfred de Musset.

Flaubert had told her that an ambitious man, engaged in a great literary undertaking, could not be expected to love with the inflamed ardour of a youth of twenty. Consequently, when she met Musset and was introduced to him in the foyer of the Comédie Française, she asked his permission to call upon him at an early date. He gave it; but anticipated her

visit by calling on her; and, as the breach with Madame Allan was then of recent date, a new "affair" —the last, so far as one knows, in the poet's life—was inaugurated.

The story—or rather Louise Colet's version of it—is told in her novel *Lui*, written and published as a corrective to George Sand's *Elle et Lui* and Paul de Musset's *Lui et Elle*. Alfred de Musset figures in the romance as Albert de Linceul. The thesis, so to say, is that Louise Colet could have consoled Musset for George Sand's betrayal of him, but would not because she could not bring herself to be unfaithful to Flaubert.

Neither of the two propositions is exact. Louise Colet was as unfaithful to Flaubert as Musset would let her be. Musset was seeking, not consolation, but diversion; and the diversion was one of which he very quickly tired. Strong drink—absinthe in particular—had weakened him; and he was incapable of satisfying a passion so exigent as that now thrust upon him. It has been suggested—and the suggestion is plausible—that he recognized the fact, and decided that he must retreat at once, in order that he might retreat with honour. The end, at any rate, was more grotesque than tragic.

Madame Colet had given Musset her portrait, and supposed that it occupied a place of honour on his mantelpiece. The fact was that he had taken it down to the lodge of the concierge, saying: "Keep this by you for reference, and if ever this lady calls and asks for me, tell her that I have gone away into the country."

It was an ingenious scheme, but it was unsuccess-

ful. Madame Colet was not to be imposed upon by fibs of that sort. She knew her way up-stairs, and was not to be stopped by any concierge, or even by the poet's faithful housekeeper. Brushing past them both, she burst in upon him; and though she found him lying on the sofa and obviously very ill, she showed him no mercy. She not only stormed at him for insulting her; she took him by the shoulders and shook him. That was her farewell; and he only forgave her for it because it was the sort of farewell which seemed definitely to close the door to any renewal of affectionate relations.

And there one may leave them, for the rest is of no importance. There is pathos, indeed—the pathos to which humour is akin—in this picture of the passionate career of a poet, who began by breaking his heart for one woman of letters amid the lagoons of Venice, and ended by being shaken by another in his Parisian apartment because he was too weak to do full justice to her passion. Yet the case was no exception, but only, as it were, a caricature or exaggeration of the rule. Almost all the passions of the Romantics ended, as we have seen, in some sort of disappointment or some sort of anti-climax. Not until we come to the great case of Victor Hugo do we encounter a love affair which we can describe as a coherent drama of steadily progressive interest; and even so——

Well, even so, as we shall see, the drama was such that the leading rôle could only have been adequately filled by a man whose commanding genius enabled him to transfigure realities and create a legend, clothing the sordid in romantic trappings, and insisting triumphantly that the ridiculous was indeed sublime.

CHAPTER XX

The Hugo legend—Victor Hugo's misstatements about his father's family—And about his mother's family—And about the precocity of his talents—And about the prize competition—And about the compliment alleged to have been paid to him by Chateaubriand—His conception of his position as the central luminary of a solar system.

WHETHER Victor Hugo was an inspired writer or a great windbag is a question still hotly debated by critics of rival schools. What is not in dispute is that he was a commanding figure, and succeeded in imposing not only his personality, but his own view of his personality, on his generation. He strode among his contemporaries as a Napoleon of Letters; and, even if it be difficult to take quite that view of him now-a-days, we must at least regard him as the literary analogue of a great actor-manager, throwing all minor literary characters into the shade, inviting the limelight and flourishing in it, cultivating his amazing personality with studious art so that he might never in any particular appear unworthy of the garish illumination.

He cultivated, that is to say, the Hugo legend. He not only cultivated it, but he created it, making of it not only a legend but also a religion. Its scriptures—one need not shrink from the word—are the various "authorized" biographies, published during his lifetime and containing the statements which he sanctioned

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concerning himself, his family, his upbringing, his beliefs, his political progress, and his supreme triumphs alike in literature and in the conduct of his life.

One of the manifestoes is the work of domestic origin written by his wife at his dictation, and entitled *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie.* A second is M. Barbou's *Victor Hugo et son temps.* Others are the brief sketches written by Dumas and Sainte-Beuve—before the time of the estrangement. One cannot be quite sure of Sainte-Beuve's sincerity —for Sainte-Beuve, after all, was a critic; and one may suspect that Dumas wrote with his tongue in his cheek—for that was a way he had. But they did, at any rate, accurately reproduce the master's own claims to glory; while the other biographers not only reproduced those claims but also, very obviously, believed in them. Between them, they give us, without reservation, the whole of the Hugo legend.

It is the legend of the man who was, as Tennyson puts it, "Victor in drama, Victor in Romance": outwardly the pillar and head corner-stone of the Romantic Movement, and inwardly the very incarnation of its spirit; a man whose life conformed to his pretensions, and amply justified them, and whose great career triumphantly reconciled propositions which, in the case of lesser men, would have to be dismissed as hopelessly contradictory. He figures in the legend at once as an aristocrat of long descent, and as a plebeian who, by his genius, had burst his birth's invidious bar. He figures as a husband who bravely married young for love, and whose domestic deportment—did he not write *L'art d'être grand-père?*—was a model to be admired and imitated; and he also figures as the ideal

lover of a Magdalen of the *coulisses*, who, purified by his passion and protected by his influence, shared his affection with his wife, was equally honoured with her by his friends, and helped her to inspire his genius for half a century.

Truly it is a wonderful legend; and the greatest of all the wonders connected with it is that it did not grow up after the poet's death, but was imposed and accepted during his lifetime. A man who could maintain simultaneously two establishments and a high moral tone, enjoy the "raptures and roses" and the "lilies and languors" with an equal ostentation, command an equal respect from his mistress and the mother of his children, and deliver his cryptic utterances as the oracles of God while making of the breach of the seventh commandment an habitual and almost a ceremonial act, takes admiration by storm, even though he challenges criticism. If there was genius in nothing else that Victor Hugo did, at least there was genius in that; and one feels compelled to fire a salute to the Hugo legend before proceeding to sap and undermine it. Then, having done that, one may commence the attack by carrying the genealogical outposts.

"Je veux être Chateaubriand ou rien."

That was Victor Hugo's maxim—his version of *aut Caesar aut nullus*—written by him in his copy-book when he was fourteen years of age; and as Chateaubriand had presented himself to the readers of his *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* with the haughtily simple boast: "I am of noble birth," so Victor Hugo also felt that ancestors were essential to his sublimity. He gave himself out, therefore, as a scion of the house of

the Hugos of Lorraine, and a great-grandson of Charles-Hyacinthe Hugo, "chevalier, conseiller-maître en la chambre des Comptes de Lorraine"; and his obedient biographers wrote down the statement, and the world believed it. But it is not true.

All the descendants of Charles-Hyacinthe Hugo, chevalier, etc., have been traced, and Victor Hugo is not included in their number. On the other hand, Victor Hugo's ascendants have been traced through four generations, and there is neither a chevalier nor a conseiller-maître to be found among them. His father was an officer who had risen from the ranks; his grandfather was a carpenter; his great-grandfather, and his great-great-grandfather were peasants. Of the women whom they married the most distinguished was a nursery governess. Among the collaterals we find a corn-factor, a baker, a barber, and three dressmakers—useful, and highly respectable members of the community, but not either aristocratic or romantic; so that our first true glimpse of Victor Hugo is a glimpse of a plebeian dissatisfied with his humble origin, perching himself on the branches of another man's family tree, and successfully persuading his admirers that he has every right to be there.

His mother—a Mademoiselle Trébuchet—was the daughter of a Nantes merchant in the shipping trade; and upon her, in place of armorial bearings, he bestows a tradition of romantic, but quite imaginary, adventures. "The author's mother," we read, "a poor girl of fifteen, fled to the Bocage, and became a brigand"—that is to say, a Vendean insurrectionist—"like Madame de Bonchamps and Madame de la Rochejacquelein." A romantic story indeed, but absolutely false. From the

beginning to the end of the Vendean revolt Sophie Trébuchet and her father never quitted Nantes, or in any way transgressed the principles of Republican circumspection ; and it was fortunate for them that they did not. Captain Hugo, who had adopted the severe Republican sobriquet of Brutus, would assuredly have shot them, or thrown them into the river, if they had ; for he was one of Carrier's men, and had been sent to Nantes for the purpose. Instead of which he fell in love with the girl, and took her to Paris, and married her in the commonplace, ordinary course.

That is our first glimpse at the Hugo legend in the making, and we get our second glimpse when we come to the stories of the poet's extraordinary precocity.

His childhood had been passed in travel. He and his mother had followed his father, who rose to the rank of lieutenant-general, from garrison to garrison. He had seen Corsica, Genoa, Florence, Rome, Naples, and Madrid, where the general was in the service of Joseph Bonaparte. Then, his father and mother having separated in consequence of domestic discords, he was brought back to Paris and sent to school, and, while still a school-boy, he began to write poetry. Undoubtedly he was precocious—undoubtedly he had a right to say so ; but he nevertheless improved upon the truth.

He might have boasted truthfully that, at the age of seventeen, he defeated Lamartine, who was twelve years his senior, in an open poetical competition for a prize offered by the Academy of Toulouse ; but that did not suffice for him. He must also give out that, when he was no more than fifteen, the French Academy

itself defrauded him of a similar prize, to which he was admittedly entitled by the superior merits of his composition; and that story is a fond thing vainly invented.

The Academy, so the story goes, believed that the young poet had deceived them as to his age, and punished him for the supposed practical joke by only awarding him an *accessit*. He ran to the judges, triumphantly flourishing his birth-certificate; but they said that, though they were very sorry, it was too late for them to alter their decision; so that Victor Hugo had to take the second instead of the first place. The actual fact is that, in a field of forty-six competitors, he took not the first nor yet the second, but only the ninth place; and, as appears from documents in the archives of the Academy, only received his "honourable mention" because the judges felt that "encouragement" was due to him on account of his tender years.

For any ordinary man the actual facts would have been good enough; but they were not good enough for Victor Hugo. He had a legend to build. He knew that it is through striking and picturesque details that legends capture the popular imagination; and he supplied them as often as they were required—not in this instance only, but in many others also.

He supplied them, for example—if one may anticipate—when he reprinted the articles which he had contributed, between the ages of seventeen and twenty to the *Conservateur littéraire*. The method then was to ante-date the articles, so as to represent that he had written them all when quite a child, to revise, and re-write, and improve them—and then to state in his preface that he had published them "without a single

alteration," so that his readers might exclaim aghast at the maturity of his early style and the precocity of his sage reflections.

Similarly—if one may anticipate still further—when he reprinted the speeches which he had delivered before the legislative chamber. In this case he not only tampered with the official text of the *Moniteur*, so as to eliminate the expressions of clerical and loyalist sympathy which he had since repudiated; he also altered the *Moniteur's* report of the attitude of his audience. He inserted parenthetic applause where there had been none; for "cheers," he substituted "loud and prolonged cheers"; for "loud and prolonged cheers," he substituted "a deafening outburst of clamorous bravos." And so forth, and so forth, never losing the chance to enrich the legend with a detail, but always building, building, until he reached what one may call, provisionally at least, the climax, when he imposed the dogma that Chateaubriand, his model and exemplar, and the high priest of letters in France, amazed by the dazzling splendour of his Ode on the Death of the Duc de Berry, had saluted him as "enfant sublime."

Sainte-Beuve declared that Chateaubriand had inserted the compliment in a note in his own *Conservateur*. Informed that the files of the *Conservateur* had been searched for it in vain, he said that he supposed that he had been mistaken, and that the phrase must have appeared, not in the *Conservateur* but in the *Quotidienne*. The files of the *Quotidienne* have also been searched, and there is no trace of it. Sainte-Beuve's allegation, therefore, may be taken as disproved, and a similar fate awaits the more circumstantial state-

ment of "Un témoin de la vie"—that is to say, of Victor Hugo himself.

"M. de Chateaubriand," says this authority, "spoke enthusiastically of the Ode in conversation with M. Agier, a deputy of the Right, characterizing the author as 'enfant sublime.' M. Agier wrote an article on the Ode in the *Drapeau Blanc*, and quoted M. de Chateaubriand's phrase. The expression was caught up and repeated everywhere, and Victor Hugo began to be really celebrated."

Very possibly he did—but as the result not of Chateaubriand's advertisements, but of his own. For it is not true that M. Agier wrote an article about the Ode in the *Drapeau Blanc*. All that he wrote was a paragraph for the *Conservateur*—in which the "mot" is not to be discovered; and Chateaubriand himself, when questioned about it by a brother Academician, denied having used it. It was a happy collocation of words, he said, but it was not his.

It was, in fact, Victor Hugo's own. He invented it, and attributed it to Chateaubriand for his own greater glory. His justification is that he succeeded, floating to fame on his own eulogy, and not being found out until, the fame having been achieved, it was too late to matter. That fact, it must be admitted, is more sublime even than the eulogy itself. The hero of the feat was fairly earning the title to think and speak of the Romantic Movement as the movement of a solar system of which he was the sun and the other luminaries were only subordinate satellites revolving round him.

The conception, though it was his own, was not altogether an unjust one. The Romantic Movement was, in fact, destined to become more and more theatrical—more and more like a company dependent upon the scintillations of a single star; and Victor Hugo was more and more to assume, and to be allowed, the unique functions of its actor-manager.

But not quite yet. At the point at which we have arrived, the Romantic Movement was only just beginning in Charles Nodier's salon at the Arsenal; and the Hugo legend, as yet, was not made, but only in the making. Victor Hugo has still to work and work at it on the principle of *nulla dies sine linea.*

CHAPTER XXI

Victor Hugo as hero-worshipper—Withdraws his praise of Alexandre Soumet—Transfers his praise of Alfred de Vigny to Milton—The figure which he cut in salons—And on balconies—Unpromising material out of which the Hugo legend had to be constructed.

Charles Nodier's salon has been the subject of an earlier chapter; and it is not necessary to go over that ground again. All that one need stop to note now is that it contained from the first the cankering germ of destruction. It was a literary reunion in which the younger men grew up and flourished under the patronage of their elders. They owed it to their vanity to assert themselves, revolt, and break, or rather drift, away. The Arsenal could only be for them a stepping-stone towards a salon of their own, in which they would direct literature under a leader of their own choosing, and in which the men of the previous generation, if they presented themselves at all, would have to take a lower place. In a moment or two we shall see them doing so; but in the meanwhile there was a golden age of literary harmony in which Victor Hugo lived on terms not merely of peace but of enthusiasm with his seniors as well as his contemporaries.

He was a hero-worshipper in those days, as young men of letters almost inevitably are; and progress in his case consisted largely in the dethroning of the

early idols and the withdrawal of the homage paid to them. Admiration of others, he seems to have argued, implies depreciation of oneself. It was inconsistent with the dignity of the sun to abase itself before the stars; the evidence that the sun had done so in a misguided past must be suppressed. The idea that Victor Hugo, the hub of the literary universe, had once actually been dazzled by the genius of Chateaubriand, of Alfred de Vigny, and even of Alexandre Soumet! Perish the thought! The written word which chronicled such foolishness must not remain.

It did not remain, though documents had to be tampered with in order to get rid of it.

Alexandre Soumet had been "Alexander the Great" for the young men who came to the Arsenal. Victor Hugo had dedicated a book to him, and the dedication was full of flattery. But Victor Hugo had become an acknowledged man of genius, whereas Alexandre Soumet had declined into a prosy and tedious old gentleman. It would never do for the world to think that Victor Hugo had once had a high opinion of Alexandre Soumet; and therefore the flattering dedication was suppressed, and later editions of the book appeared without it.

Similarly with Alfred de Vigny. Victor Hugo, in his youth, had reviewed his *Eloa*, calling it "a magic picture," "a terrible lesson given in enchanting verse," and saying that in it "the highest truths of religion and philosophy" were "developed in one of the most beautiful creations of poetical fiction." The day came when Victor Hugo wanted to reprint that essay, and yet to avoid giving the impression that he

saw anything remarkable in the talents of a contemporary. The task would have baffled most men, but Victor Hugo was equal to it. For *Eloa* in his manuscript he substituted *Paradise Lost;* and the praises which he had lavished upon his friend he transferred, without any other change in the text, to Milton.

Chateaubriand, of course, could not be dealt with quite like that. His reputation was too great. Moreover, he had exclaimed—or Victor Hugo had said that he had exclaimed: *Enfant sublime!* and there was, therefore, nothing to be gained, but something to be lost, by denying that he was a person of importance. It was enough to point out that he had not dazzled the eyes of Victor Hugo as he had dazzled the eyes of the world. Hence the statement that Chateaubriand wore false teeth, and sent for a basin, and took them out and cleaned them while receiving Victor Hugo's visit. For clearly a man of genius who cleaned his false teeth in the presence of a comparative stranger lacked some of the qualities proper to a man of genius, and could not fail to lose some of his reputation for dignity when the circumstance was published to the world.

It sounds a cold-blooded calculation; but supremely successful men have generally been cold-blooded, and the advantage which they enjoy in emotional and sentimental circles is obvious. One of Victor Hugo's secrets, at any rate, was that he never lost his head, and never gave away a chance. Poets might be for him, as he wrote, "sentinels left by the Lord on the towers of Jerusalem"; but he never allowed his absorption in his art to distract his attention from the

necessity of taking the centre of the stage, striking effective attitudes, and bidding the world behold and admire him as the portent of his times.

One of his principles was that he must never fail —or at all events, if that were impossible, must never admit that he had failed. As a matter of fact he failed several times, both with his books and with his plays; but he was fertile in devices for concealing and covering up the failures. *Han d'Islande* was a failure. Fifteen hundred copies were printed, and only about seven hundred of them were sold. His agreement with his publishers, however, provided for the division of the fifteen hundred copies into twelve editions; and the number of copies which he claimed to have sold when he promulgated the Hugo legend was twelve thousand.

His drama *Amy Robsart* was also a failure, being hooted off the stage at the Odéon after a run of one night only; but Victor Hugo had foreseen that contingency, and had provided against it. Knowing the risk he took, he produced the piece anonymously, prepared to step forward and take the credit if it succeeded, but provided with a "whipping-boy," in the person of his brother-in-law, Paul Foucher, who had promised to bear the brunt of the reception if it were adverse. He had had nothing to do with the play, he wrote to the papers on the morning following its production, except to "write in a few phrases and scenes" to oblige a friend who was really responsible for the work.

Paul Foucher tells the story in *Les coulisses du passé*. "I had nothing to do with the play," he writes, "except to sign it;" and as he was only

eighteen at the time, whereas Victor Hugo was six-and-twenty, we need have no difficulty in believing him. The marvel is that he kept the secret till his old age, being fully persuaded at the time that he rendered a service, not merely to friendship but to literature, by accepting the hisses intended for his distinguished relative.

Similarly, though a little differently, with *Hernani*, already mentioned more than once.

The problem, this time, was not to divert the discredit of failure into a harmless channel, but to command success whether it was deserved or not. The case was critical, and the professional *claque* could not be trusted; so an amateur *claque* was recruited from among the author's personal friends and admirers. It was no matter of assembling a dozen noisy young enthusiasts at haphazard in a hurry. A whole regiment of enthusiasts was systematically collected. Half the house was placed at the author's disposal for the purpose, and he packed it. Strident youths, with throats of brass and lungs of leather, gathered by arrangement for the battle from every studio in Paris, convinced that, in helping an individual, they were promoting the triumph of a cause—convinced, as Théophile Gautier put it, that Victor Hugo was a new Moses fresh from Sinai, charged to deliver the Tables of the Law.

Decidedly Victor Hugo was a man who knew how to cast a spell upon his friends; and if we desire a picture of his friends under the spell, we cannot do better than turn to Madame Ancelot's *Souvenirs of the Salons of Paris*, which tell us what happened when the poet recited his poems. The effect, says Madame

Ancelot, was so tremendous that such compliments as "superb" and "prodigious" were felt to be inadequate to the occasion.

"When he ceased, there was silence for several seconds. Then one of the company stepped forward with visible emotion, and, lifting his eyes to heaven, took the poet by the hand. The group listened, and then a single word was heard, to the great amazement of the unitiated, and echoed in every corner of the room—

"'A cathedral!'

"Then the speaker returned to his place, and another arose and exclaimed—

"'An ogive!'

"Whereupon a third looked carefully round the room, and hazarded—

"'A Pyramid of Egypt!'

"And then the assembly applauded, and once more relapsed into silent reflection; but the silence was only the prelude to an explosion of voices, repeating in chorus the sacramental words which each of the speakers had already uttered separately."

Truly a striking picture, and one as a pendant to which, though it belongs to a later date, it seems proper to present the similar picture drawn in the *Souvenirs sur Turgueneff*—

"One evening Hugo's admirers, assembled in his drawing-room, were competing with one another in the eulogy of his genius; and the idea was thrown out, among others, that the street in which he lived ought to bear his name.

"Some one suggested that the street was too small to be worthy of so great a poet, and that the honour of bearing his name ought to be assigned to some more important thoroughfare.

"Then they proceeded to enumerate the most popular quarters of Paris, in an ascending scale, until one man exclaimed with enthusiasm that it would be an honour for the City of Paris itself to be renamed after the man of genius.

"Hugo, leaning against the mantelpiece, listened complacently to his flatterers outbidding each other. Then, with the air of one engaged in deep thought, he turned to the young man, and said to him in his grand style—

"'Even that will come, my friend. Even that will come.'"

Though it has not come, one feels, when one reads the story, that it very easily might have, if the poet had not, at the height of his fame, fled from the country and called his Emperor Napoleon the Little; and one has the same impression when one reads the accounts of the proceedings at the various *cénacles* in which Victor Hugo sat like a literary king upon a throne, surrounded by a literary court.

Only one member of the court—the materialistic Arsène Houssaye—was so profane as to remark in confidence to Théophile Gautier that the *cénacle* would have been more to his taste if the host had provided his guests with something to drink. For the rest—at all events they have left no record to the contrary—the feast of reason and the flow of soul sufficed. The poet, for them, had long been The Master, and was soon

to be styled Olympio. They addressed him reverentially as "O great Victor Hugo," and offered him such flattery as we have quoted. They were privileged to be with him when deputations of boys from the upper forms of the public schools knocked at his door and were admitted to lay the homage of to-morrow at his feet. And, finally, they were privileged, as his retinue, to step out with him on to the balcony of his apartment at the hour at which—the same hour every day—he deigned to show himself, like a monarch, to the populace which regularly looked out for him, and the strangers who came from far lands to gaze upon his countenance.

Such was the man, and such were his circumstances and surroundings. The picture has, of course, no direct bearing upon the romance which is the principal object of this narrative; but it has been necessary to draw it, in order that the psychology of the romance may be intelligible. It is the picture of a man for whom life, from beginning to end, was a spectacle, a pageant, a procession, in which he took the central place, because he felt that no one else was worthy of it. His vision of the world was a vision of Victor Hugo surrounded by other things; and of the romantic career of a man who not only sees such a vision as that, but insists successfully that other people shall see it also, certain things may be confidently predicted.

He will never suffer poignantly, and he will always keep up appearances. Whatever the realities, there will always be the outward semblance of majestic triumph; whatever the disillusions, there will always remain the one illusion of supreme importance. It is

impossible to picture Victor Hugo failing as Alfred de Vigny failed, and wailing on the housetops that all was vanity, because a woman was untrue—he loved himself too well to be tempted to such lamentations. It is equally impossible to picture him failing as Sainte-Beuve failed, and pitching a light o' love's underclothing out of an upper chamber into the street as an intimation that he had found her out, and wished to have nothing more to do with her—he had far too delicate a sense of dignity for that. His rôle was rather to ignore, and compel the world to ignore, whatever did not consort with dignity—the infidelity of his wife, for instance—and at the same time to bestow an Olympian glamour upon the most commonplace of intrigues ; and he achieved his task.

The materials out of which he had to build this section of the Hugo legend were not very promising. His mistress, before she became his mistress, had been little more than a common prostitute. His wife, when she heard about his mistress, made him a cuckold. Her lover boasted so publicly that all Paris came to know. Of a truth it required a man of genius to make a romantic legend out of that ; but Victor Hugo made one, as we shall see when we come to the story of Juliette Drouet.

CHAPTER XXII

Juliette Drouet—Her reasons for not taking the veil—She becomes Pradier's mistress and model—She goes on the stage—Protected by Alphonse Karr and a Russian nobleman—Plays in one of Victor Hugo's pieces—He proposes to set her up in a second establishment—Pradier and other friends give him money for the purpose—*Le Livre de l'Anniversaire*—What Hugo's friends thought—Vindication of his conduct by Alfred Asseline.

JULIETTE DROUET was really Julienne Gauvain. Born at Fougères in 1806, and left an orphan in infancy, she was adopted by a great-uncle, Jean-Baptiste Drouet, of the Woods and Forests Service, whose name she took. He and his wife being both ardent Catholics, they sent her to the Petit-Picpus boarding-school, conducted by the Bernardine Benedictines of the Perpetual Adoration, intending that she should take the veil and so relieve them of all further responsibility for her.

She did not take it. On the contrary the one anecdote of her school-days which has been preserved is to the effect that she wrote out a "confession" which ran as follows—

"My father, I accuse myself of avarice. My father, I accuse myself of adultery. My father, I accuse myself of having looked and smiled at gentlemen."

It was, of course, only a child's innocent joke;

JULIETTE DROUET

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but children who make innocent jokes of the kind are not well adapted to the cloister. The Bishop, Monseigneur de Quélen—the original, it is said, of Bishop Myriel in *Les Misérables*—had his suspicions and put a question to the novice.

"My child," he asked her. "Do you feel that you really have a vocation for the religious life?"

"Not in the least, my Lord," was the little girl's reply; and the Bishop turned to the Lady Superior, asking—

"Reverend mother, what is the meaning of this?"

It meant, the reverend mother explained, that the child was an orphan, and unprovided for, so that the convent was her only protection from the dangers of the world.

"Think of it!" she added. "A girl with a pretty face like hers, exposed to all the perils——"

"No matter! Anything is better than a nun who makes a scandal," said the Bishop wisely; and he sent for the great-uncle, who swore round oaths, and called the girl "a silly little fool," but nevertheless took her home with him.

What next happened to her is an unsolved mystery; but at the end of three years she reappears as the model and mistress of Pradier the sculptor. Whether she became his mistress because she had been his model, or became his model because she was his mistress, would be a subject of speculation if it mattered; but the conjunction of rôles has never been uncommon in French artistic circles. Pradier, at all events, immortalized Juliette in his allegorical statue of Strasburg; and she bore him a daughter; and then he broke off his relations with her—whether

because he was tired of her, or because her conduct gave him grounds for doing so.

The theatre was her next resource. Félix Harel, whom she had met in Pradier's studio, gave her her first chance at the Théâtre Royal at Brussels. She returned to Paris with him, and was allotted minor parts at the Porte Saint-Martin, and the Odéon ; but it was not to her histrionic talents that she owed such success as she achieved. According to the contemporary dramatic critics, her gesticulations were ridiculous, and she hardly knew how to walk across the stage. The *Artiste* compared her to a swan which might "pierce the clouds in its majestic flight," but could only waddle when it came to earth. She was, that is to say, in modern parlance, rather a "show girl" than an actress, but richly endowed with admirers and protectors because she was beautiful and magnificently statuesque. Alphonse Karr was one of the privileged ; and she derived the greater part of her revenues, not from the box-office, but from a Russian nobleman who covered her with jewels and had furnished a luxurious apartment for her.

If she had little talent, however, she had pretensions and ambitions. She spoke, to those who would listen, of her "art," and sought a chance of "showing the public what she could do" ; and, to that end, she called on Victor Hugo and asked if she might have the part of Princess Negroni in his *Lucrèce Borgia*. The story, told by Paul Chenay, that she expressed her reverence for his genius by taking off his boots in public is more likely to be false than true ; but the rôle, by whatever insidious means she sued for it, was assigned to her.

It was a part of little importance, and she made nothing of it. Her performance provoked the comparison of her movements, already quoted, to those of a waddling swan. But her appearance also drew from Théophile Gautier a eulogy of "the antique perfection of her neck, her shoulders, and her arms," and an allusion to "the young Athenian women who undraped themselves in the presence of Praxiteles"; while Victor Hugo himself was instantly conquered by her attractions.

He had been married, at the age of twenty, to Adèle Foucher, who was a year his junior. The marriage had been a love match, and a leap in the dark, as far as worldly prospects were concerned; but things had turned out well. The Member of the Academy of the Floral Games of Toulouse—so the poet described himself, with a characteristic touch, in his "acte de mariage"—had led the Romantic revolt, and become the most popular poet, and one of the most successful playwrights of the day.

Nor had his married life been other than decorous. He had, in Flaubert's phrase, "lived like a bourgeois while thinking like a demi-God." The flattery of women, though lavished on him abundantly, had never turned his head. He had accepted it as his due and acknowledged it with condescension; but all his love poems were addressed to Madame Hugo. It really seemed that he was still as much in love with her at the end of eleven years as when he wrote those passionate "lettres à la fiancée" which have since been published.

His friends noted the fact, and admired. It seemed strange to them that so great a poet should live so chaste

a life; but they also believed that Victor Hugo had once more achieved the impossible, and that, in spite of his genius, or perhaps because of it, the domestic affections sufficed for him. But eleven years is a long time; and a man is not yet middle-aged at thirty-one; and Victor Hugo and Juliette Drouet were both accustomed to attend those theatrical dances at which temptation presents itself in its most insidious shape.

It was at such a dance that they first met, sometime in the year 1832; and that meeting may perhaps explain the actress's courage in calling to propose herself for a part in the author's forthcoming play and the author's readiness to give it to her without inquiring too closely as to her capacity. There was another dance of just the same kind, a fortnight after the production of the piece; and then——

"Beloved one, do you remember? Our first night! It was a Carnival night—Shrove-Tuesday, 1833. There was a ball at one of the theatres, and we were both to have gone to it. (I interrupt myself to kiss you, and now I go on.) The hours of that night are even now passing in procession through my memory, like stars passing through the eye of my soul. You were to have gone to the ball, and you did not go. You waited for me instead.

"What a delightful silence reigned in your little room! Outside we heard Paris laugh and sing, and the masqueraders go to and fro, and we held our own secret festival in the midst of the general fête. Paris enjoyed the false drunkenness, and we the true."

Thus, though at greater length, Victor Hugo wrote in the *Livre de l'Anniversaire:* the manuscript volume in which, every year, on February 17, it was his custom to write a few lines to celebrate his mistress and his passion for her. One would gather from the pæan, not only that the fortress yielded at the first assault, but also that the assailant ruled there without a rival, thenceforth until the end. It is the Hugo legend that he did so, and that Madame Hugo did not mind, but recognized his right, as a God, to raise any mortal to the rank of left-handed goddess, and was contented, if not actually proud, that he should exercise it. Once more, however, the legend has to be checked by facts; and the marvel once more is that, in view of the facts, it should have been possible to construct the legend.

The fact is that, though the fortress did indeed yield provisionally on Shrove-Tuesday, Victor Hugo entered it, not as a conqueror, but as a poacher on another man's preserves. He imagined that he had ousted all his rivals, but he was deceived. Juliette was lavish in promises, but she did not keep them. She wanted jewels and luxuries, as "show girls" generally do. She had her salary—but of course she could not live on that; and as Victor Hugo was not, at that date, rich enough to supply her needs, what could she do but retain her *amant en titre* while taking an *amant de cœur?*

So she argued; and, of course, there was nothing out of the way in the argument, or in the situation. Theatrical show girls have argued like that ever since theatrical show girls have been. The novelty lies in Victor Hugo's way of dealing with the situation, over-

coming the obstacles, and comporting himself thereafter as if no obstacles had been encountered.

He laid his case before his friends and admirers, and, if the vulgar expression may be permitted, he "sent round the hat." Here, he pointed out, was a Magdalen ready and waiting to be reclaimed by him if only she could be assured a regular and sufficient income. He could not himself assure her that income, and he could not reclaim her unless he did assure it; so they must help him. Pradier, of course, must head the list—for Pradier had loved Juliette once, and must wish to see her happy, even if he could not make her so; but the others must also subscribe, each a little, according to their means. And so they did; with the result that the triumphant career of Victor Hugo presents the unique example of a man of genius organizing a public subscription to enable him to set up a second establishment in a style worthy of his literary position.

Not all his friends, of course, were equally sympathetic. David d'Angers[1] was shocked—particularly shocked by the rumour, unfounded as it turned out, that Victor Hugo proposed to become a theatrical manager in order to present his "show girl" in leading parts. "A *liaison* with a wrong-headed woman," he wrote to Victor Pavie, "transmutes gold into lead." He hoped that the poet's noble soul would some day understand that there were "depths to which it must not sink"; but meanwhile he saw him "entangled

[1] The sculptor (1788–1856). He lived on terms of close friendship with the Romantics, and most of them sat to him for medallions or busts.

like Laocoon," and "brought into association with a very vile side of human nature."

M. Foucher, again, Madame Hugo's father, was naturally much perturbed, and very anxious about his daughter's dignity and happiness.

"You know" (he wrote to his step-sister, Madame Asseline), "the beauty from the Porte Saint-Martin, that Princess Negroni who, in her anxiety to reform herself, has quitted her large apartment for a smaller one? Is that still worrying Adèle? And how is the conversion of the princess progressing? I should be very glad to learn that the *liaison* which was still in progress when I left Paris had come to a termination satisfactory to my daughter."

It had not done so, and it was not to do so. We will speak of Madame Hugo's attitude in the matter presently, when the career of Sainte-Beuve comes up for consideration. Meanwhile we note that Victor Hugo never regretted the step which he had taken, but rejoiced in open and triumphant exultation in the ravishing delights of the second establishment which had been provided for him at the cost of the wealthier lover whose cast-off mistress he had taken for his Muse.

"February has always been a month of marked importance for me. On the 26th of February, 1802, I was born to life; on the 17th of February, 1833, I was born to happiness in your arms. The first date marks only life. The second marks love; and love is more than life."

"Three years ago, at this hour, I lay, for the first time, in your arms. Never have I known an hour more radiant than that hour of mystery. That night our souls were welded together; that night a new being was born in me."

"It is our anniversary to-day! What a beautiful morning! How brightly the sun shines! Heaven shares our joy, sweet angel, does it not? Four years! Four years! I bless you for them, Juliette, and I thank you.

"You are my joy, my life, my happiness, the only thing I think of. I hope you are quite well this morning. You were so pretty yesterday. I love you, I love you with all my soul. . . .

". . . If only, only you were here that I might kiss you, and talk to you, and admire you! Four years!

"Dearest Juliette, you are a good and sweet and charming woman, and as beautiful as if you were not good. You have two beauties at once—the beauty of the body, and the beauty of the soul. I thank God for you, and I love you."

"Your name, my angel, awakens all the echoes of my soul. There are rays of sunlight for me in your name as in your eyes.

"Loved one, may you be very, very happy!"

Such are a few more typical extracts from the *Livre de l'Anniversaire*, already referred to: eloquent passages, well worthy of a better case. Side by side with them we may place Victor Hugo's justification of himself in a letter to Victor Pavie. "The theatre," he

writes, "is a church," and "humanity is a religion." He on his part "has a mission to accomplish, and is accomplishing it"; and he goes on—

"Never have I been guilty of so many faults as this year, and yet never have I been a better man. I am a far better man now than in that time of 'innocence' which you regret. Formerly I was innocent, but now I am indulgent. God knows that there is great progress there; and I have with me a good and dear friend who knows it too, whom you reverence as I do, and who loves me and forgives me. To love and to forgive—that is more than mere man can accomplish. It is a task for God—and for woman."

Which must mean, if it means anything, that Madame Hugo herself is one of the sympathizers, and cannot bring herself to disapprove of her husband's manner of reclaiming the Magdalen. An amazing belief truly; and the most amazing thing about it is that, though it was not quite true at the time, Victor Hugo succeeded in making it very nearly true before the end.

For the moment, indeed, Madame Hugo had her own preoccupations. Sainte-Beuve, the tempter, was whispering insidious temptations in her ear—a separate story which must be separately told. Passing over that episode, for the moment, however, we do find her so tolerant of her husband's life of gilded and majestic bigamy that she does not even allow her relatives to resent her treatment on her behalf. It is her cousin, Alfred Asseline, who writes in his recollections of *Victor Hugo intime*—

"In the existing state of our morality it is admitted that men of superior genius are privileged to impose upon the society which they charm and adorn a friend —*the* friend—the woman whom it has pleased them to select as the veiled witness of their labours: she who, whether his legitimate wife or not, remains in the background, the discreet confidante of the man of genius at the hour at which the flame of his brilliancy is kindled.

"She is no vulgar Egeria. She is the Muse: the poet's very soul, which it is our privilege to behold, to admire, and to revere in the expansive moments of friendship."

That, we take it, was, in the end, the official family view of Juliette Drouet; but the end was not yet, and we must once more turn back and review the story.

CHAPTER XXIII

Juliette's failure on the stage—Victor Hugo celebrates her virtues in verse—Sainte-Beuve's sardonic comments—Victor Hugo unfaithful to Juliette—The story of Blanche—Of Claire—Of Madame Biard—The *coup d'état*—Victor Hugo's flight to Brussels—Juliette helps him to hide—Madame Hugo reconciled to Juliette.

JULIETTE'S artistic pretensions died hard. Victor Hugo, like Alfred de Vigny and many another man of less importance, was pressed to exert "influence," and procure "engagements." The "show girl" had the common weakness of desiring to display herself in parts beyond the measure of her capacity. He got her the part of Jane in his *Marie Tudor*, and she was hopeless in it. A diplomatic "indisposition" compelled her withdrawal after the first performance. "The impression which you made on me by playing the part once," the author wrote to her, "was as great as if you had played it a hundred times," which was not meant to be ironical, and may or may not have consoled her for the mocking comments of the dramatic critics; and he also, no doubt at her suggestion, sent a paragraph about her, quite in the modern style, to the *Courier Français.*

"Mademoiselle Juliette," he wrote, "the beautiful and talented young artist whom the public has so often applauded at the Porte Saint-Martin, is on the point

of quitting that theatre. Several other managers have offered her engagements ; and Mademoiselle Juliette will probably give the preference to the Comédie Française. Her endowments and exceptional intelligence make our leading theatre her proper place."

The *Courier Français*, however, refused to insert the flagrant puff. Madame Desbordes-Valmore, the poetess, hearing the story, wrote to say that she wondered Victor Hugo was not ashamed of himself; and it was only after this final rebuff that Juliette, as Victor Hugo put it, "preferred the obscurity of devotion to a dazzling career on the public stage." And the obscurity of her devotion, of course, was only comparative, as is usually the case where theatrical ladies and poets of the temperament of Victor Hugo are concerned. The second establishment was set up within a few steps of the first establishment—an arrangement more conducive to convenience than to secrecy. The mistress of it was celebrated in glowing stanzas in the poet's next volume of lyrics ; and the change in the poet's life was patent to all who took an interest in his proceedings.

Vinet of Lausanne, indeed,—that eminent broad church and literary theologian—was deceived. He read the poems, and, being already a convert to the Hugo legend, supposed that the lines written in praise of Juliette were really written in praise of Madame Hugo. This is what he says in his Studies in the French Literature of the Nineteenth Century—

"In the presence of the great collapse around him and within him, M. Victor Hugo embraces his domestic

altars. Society falls to pieces, but he takes refuge in the bosom of the family, which is society in its cradle. All our institutions are being discussed, and all our principles of duty are being analyzed and denied; but he hides his head in the bosom of a domestic affection. . . . To the blasphemies of an unhappy woman[1] against the divine institution of the family he opposes songs of inexpressible tenderness: songs in which conjugal love is raised to the level of religion—in which reverence sanctifies the most intimate relations, and the homage of a man to the wife whom he loves is as chaste and serious as it is fond."

But Sainte-Beuve, at the same time, and apropos of these same poems, was writing that Victor Hugo, bent upon a *coup-de-tête*, had broken "the domestic continuity" of his life, but that fine verse such as his would doubtless "cover up and glorify the sin"; while in his private correspondence with Victor Pavie, he expressed himself still more definitely.

"His new volume," he tells Victor Pavie, "is being printed. There is a good deal in it addressed to the beautiful Delilah. He reconciles all that as best he can, and very trickily, with the conjugal love of the *Feuilles d'Automne*, desiring no open breach. But I fancy there will be a considerable scandal and a good deal of malicious curiosity when the book comes out."

Such scandal as did occur was largely of Sainte-Beuve's own making. He had his reasons, as we shall

[1] George Sand.

see, for being mischievous. There was talk of a duel between the two authors, but a publisher made the peace ; and the ultimate conclusion of the matter was that, in the case of a man so great as Victor Hugo, scandal did not matter. He neither flaunted his irregularities, or tried to live them down. On the contrary, he made irregularity regular by long habit, attaching a religious as well as a romantic significance to his *liaison*, and requiring all those who wished to bask in the sun of his favour to that view of it. They did so ; so that Alfred Asseline, Madame Hugo's cousin, who has already been quoted, wrote of Juliette as, "his immortal Beatrice, the sceptre-bearer of his glory."

Not that the *liaison* was without its infidelities and stormy interludes. To his Muse, as to his wife, Victor Hugo could only be "faithful in his fashion" ; and, as she was no meek and jealous woman, there were a good many perturbing incidents. On more than one occasion, she had to dismiss her maids lest they should become her rivals ; and in the case, at any rate, of Blanche, her suspicions appear to have been justified. When already well over seventy years of age, Victor Hugo set up a third establishment for Blanche, on the Quai de la Tournelle, and visited her there with assiduity, though he afterwards repented, and bought her a shop, and was blackmailed by the husband whom she had married out of pique and disappointment.

There was a certain Claire too, whose identity cannot be penetrated, though the internal evidence of her letters—we have two of them—goes to show that she was young. Victor Hugo, who was now forty-nine, told her that she was pretty, promised to write

verses to her, and made appointments to meet her at the door of the Legislative Assembly. "Sometimes," she confided, "I am afraid I am doing wrong in seeing you like this, unknown to my family," but she continued—

"I come to you as to my beloved poet in whom I have as much faith as in God, whatever people may say. If you love me ever so little, you will not take advantage of the entire trust of a girl of seventeen, whose only fault is to love you too much—that is according to what people say; for you know well *I* think one can never love you too much, and that in any case it can never be wrong to do so."

So he kept his appointment with Claire, and Juliette caught him with her, and reproached him bitterly, and talked of suicide, writing—

"Oh, how I wish to die! How weary I am of this love, so painfully and fruitlessly laborious! Oh, how I long for eternal rest! My God! My God! have pity on me! Let those live who find happiness in this life, and take me who am suffering!"

And then there was the story of Madame Biard, told by Chopin to Albert Grzymala in a letter published in his *Souvenirs inédits*—

"M. Biard, an historical painter of no particular account, and a very ugly man, had a pretty wife whom M. Hugo seduced. M. Biard caught them *en flagrant délit*, so that Hugo had to show his medal, proving

that he was a peer of France, to the Commissaire of Police, to avoid being arrested. M. Biard threatened to proceed against his wife, but was satisfied with a separation by mutual consent. Hugo has disappeared, to travel for several months. Madame Hugo, most magnanimously, has taken Madame Biard under her protection ; and Juliette, the actress of the Porte Saint-Martin, so notorious ten years ago, who has been living for a long time under the protection of M. Hugo —in spite of his wife, his children, and his poetry on the domestic affections—this Juliette, I say, has gone away with him. The evil tongues of Paris are satisfied. They have something to talk about ; and there is no denying that the story is amusing—especially as Hugo now wears five decorations, and never loses an opportunity of posing as superior to all human weaknesses."

The stories are trivial, and, in the biography of an ordinary man, might be ignored ; but the reason for telling them in Hugo's case is obvious. They are inconsistent with sublimity ; and yet Victor Hugo contrived, in spite of them, to assert himself as sublime. Madame Hugo was gentle and forgave—it was actually at her instance that M. Biard consented to forego his right to a divorce. Juliette was violent, but forgave—forgiveness was essential to the progress of her transfiguration from show girl to Muse—her gradual rise from notoriety to glory.

Her lover does not seem, indeed, to have poured his riches very lavishly into her lap. In spite of the contributions levied from Pradier and the others, her new apartment was much smaller than that of which

the Russian prince had paid the rent. In one of her letters we find "love and ready money" coupled as *desiderata;* and in another we encounter a really eloquent appeal for the loan of "the miserable sum of a hundred sous." She was in love, however, and she understood that position and consideration, no less than wealth, were things worth aiming at. As the mistress of other men she had merely been a light o' love, kept in the background. Victor Hugo alone was able, as well as willing, to promote her to the dignity of a left-handed queen. She travelled with him openly, when he took his holidays; and, at the time of Napoleon's *coup d'état*, she helped him to arrange his flight to Belgium and joined him there.

The developments which led up to the precipitate departure for Brussels cannot be related here. Enough to say that Victor Hugo, after traversing every shade of political opinion—after being a Legitimist an Orleanist, and a Bonapartist—had become a Republican in the end. For the last transformation, at all events, personal jealousy of Louis Bonaparte seems to have been partially responsible. Once he had acclaimed him as a saviour of society; but now he hated him with a hatred almost without parallel in history, and denounced him with unexampled rancour. He believed that the rancour was reciprocated, and that his life was in danger.

Probably it was in no danger at all. He was not the leader of the opposition to Louis Bonaparte, though he afterwards persuaded himself that he had been. He would have been an embarrassing prisoner, and his execution would have outraged public senti-

ment. His actions were not conspicuous, but his screams would make the welkin ring. From every point of view the sound policy for Louis Bonaparte was not to arrest him, but to frighten him away ; and Louis Bonaparte was shrewd. And, on the other hand, it was more dignified for Victor Hugo to slip out of the country in disguise than to drive boldly to the railway station and take a first-class ticket. So great a man, with a Hugo legend to build, must not merely retire ; he must escape.

For a few days, therefore, he lay hidden, first in Juliette's apartment—where the police, if they had really wanted him, would certainly have come to look for him,—and then in the house of one of his friends, the Marquis de Montferrier. Juliette procured him a false passport and a workman's blouse. A reporter of one of the newspapers, whose discretion could not be relied upon, happening to call in quest of news, the Marquis took him round to a restaurant, and made him drunk ; and by the time the reporter was under the table the poet was safely across the frontier, installed in a small lodging above a tobacconist's shop, and living, together with Juliette, at a cost, as he wrote to his son, whom he urged to an equal economy, of no more than £4 a month. Then, about a fortnight later, we find Juliette writing him the following remarkable letter—

"Never mind about me, my poor dear friend. I never love you better, and am never more certain of your love, than when I know that you are occupied with your family duties, and with the task of assuring the tranquillity and happiness of your wife and children.

Pray consecrate yourself entirely, as long as you remain here, to that courageous and worthy woman. Give her every possible distraction from the cruel trials which she has undergone . . . give her every consolation and joy that you can. Lavish upon her the respect and affection which she deserves, without any fear that you will wear out my confidence in you and my patience."

M. Léon Séché reads that to mean that Juliette now offered to resign her place in Victor Hugo's life, and leave him. It is possible; but one imagines that, if she had really meant that, she would have expressed herself more explicitly. Most likely she did not know exactly what she meant, but wrote under the influence of a spasmodic, transitory emotion, echoing, it may be, something that Victor Hugo himself had said to her, feeling that Madame Hugo, who had stayed in Paris to sell the furniture, was amazingly kind and tolerant, and that a certain reciprocal expansiveness was due on her part also. At all events, she left the door open for retreat; and, in due course, she retreated. She wanted to depart as little as Victor Hugo wanted to lose her; and Madame Hugo, we are told, was so filled with admiration for her conduct that she "gave her her hand like a friend."

It sounds strange; but it seems to be more or less true. Madame Hugo had a genius for self-abnegation, as her behaviour in the Biard affair has shown us; and she may now have argued—whether spontaneously or at the suggestion of a stronger will—that Juliette had earned a right to a share in her husband by her exertions on his behalf. At any rate, however

she put it to herself, she did accept the situation ; and when the time came for Victor Hugo to leave Brussels, first for Jersey, and then for Guernsey, Juliette migrated with him openly, an acknowledged member of his retinue.

CHAPTER XXIV

Departure from Brussels—Jersey—Guernsey—Hauteville House—The second establishment—Madame Hugo writes her husband's life at his dictation—Her melancholy—The visit and sympathy of Alfred Asseline—Madame Hugo proposes Juliette's health at a banquet—Death of Madame Hugo—Juliette takes her place in Victor Hugo's house—Completion of the edifice of the Hugo legend.

It is a part of the Hugo legend that the Belgian Government passed a special law—the *Loi Fadier*—for the purpose of expelling Victor Hugo from the country. The *Loi Fadier*, as a matter of fact, was not even projected until after his departure, and was designed to meet the case of other, and more dangerous, refugees. Victor Hugo was not expelled either under that law or under any other. He merely received a hint that he had better go, and went, discharging a furious farewell speech at Antwerp, warning the Belgians that Louis Bonaparte would probably invade their territory, and exhorting them to eject him with pitchforks if he did. Or, at all events, he says he made such a speech, though the only report of it is to be found in an edition of his collected works, published more than twenty years afterwards.

Marine Terrace, Jersey, was his next address ; but he was once more invited to migrate on account of his turbulent words. He went to Guernsey, and being allowed to settle there, bought Hauteville House. It

was at Hauteville House that he wrote *Les Misérables*, *Les travailleurs de la mer*, and several other very popular books; and he remained there, only varying his sojourn with occasional trips to Brussels, until the proclamation of the Republic made it possible for him to return to France.

Juliette, as has already been stated, was of the party; and she enjoyed a position which is probably unique in the annals of the amours of men of letters. Her status in Paris, though assured, had been equivocal. If there had been no actual secrecy about her relations with her poet, at least there had been some thin pretence of secrecy. Though everybody knew, nobody was supposed to know. Even Madame Hugo could at least pretend to the world that she knew nothing for certain. There was no intercourse between the two establishments. The wife and the mistress did not meet. Victor Hugo affected to deceive; Madame Hugo pretended to be imposed upon by the deception.

At Guernsey, however, all that was quickly changed. It was impossible to mystify the world in a small provincial town, and Victor Hugo did not attempt to do so. His rôle was rather to assert himself, claiming that men of genius had, like kings, the right to bestow their affections openly where they chose, without, on that account, breaking up their homes, or considering that their neglect exposed their spouses to contumely. His relations with Juliette, in short, were like those of Louis XIV with Madame de Montespan, and Louis XV with Madame de Pompadour; and he kept up appearances even while he defied them. He lived, that is to say, in his own house, patriarchally, with his family

about him ; but he also took and furnished a second house, close by, for Juliette, and installed her in it, and visited her daily, and took all his friends and most of his visitors to see her. Visitor after visitor has related how he passed from one house to the other and paid his respects to both ladies on the same day.

It is said that Madame Hugo did not mind. It is said that she realized that she was unworthy to be the wife of so great a man, and admitted that Juliette understood her husband better than she did. Very likely she was right about that ; for though the preferences of the human heart are inscrutable, it can seldom be out of perversity alone that a man prefers another woman to his wife. Juliette may have been a more ingenious flatterer than Madame Hugo ; she may have had other charms which her very commonplace letters do not reveal to us. Madame Hugo, on the other hand, may have been too domesticated to accompany genius in all its flights. All sorts of explanations are possible ; but it is an idle task to guess at them. All that one can say for certain is that Madame Hugo impresses one during the period as a woman crushed and cowed, accepting the inevitable because she knows herself to be too feeble to fight against it.

It was at this period that she wrote the life of her husband which has been quoted and referred to : *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie ;* and the conditions in which she wrote it are known to us both from her letters and from his. She wrote, not of her own motion, but at his suggestion ; he told her what to write, and she wrote it. The Hugo legend is sketched in her book at Hugo's own dictation ; all his false statements are faithfully reproduced. It is all written just

as he would have written it himself—a vainglorious manifesto, as little illumined by sympathy or affection as by criticism. "A book without a heart," writes M. Biré; just the sort of book, it may be added, that one would expect to be written by a weak, unloved woman, acting under the compulsion of a stronger will, and well aware that, while she wrote, the hero, whose imaginary feats she celebrated, was seeking the satisfaction which she could not give him in another woman's company.

Few books—few biographies, at all events—have been more pathetic in the circumstances of their origin than that; and there is pathos in every intimate glimpse of the writer's life which the notes of her visitors give us. A glimpse taken from Alfred Asseline's *Victor Hugo intime* will serve as well as any.

He begins with praise of Juliette. She "had well deserved," he says, "to follow the poet into exile," and she "lived nobly in the shadow of the poet's glory." Then he goes on—

"One day, entering Madame Victor Hugo's drawing-room at Hauteville, I found her alone, wrapped in thought, and looking rather ill. Her eyesight was already very weak at this date, and she did not perceive the distress which her indisposition caused me.

"'You don't dine here to-day, you know,' she said.

"'Why not?'

"'The gentlemen have arranged a party at Madame Drouet's, and they are expecting you to join them.'

"'But I would rather dine with you. I do not like the idea of leaving you alone.'

"'I am going to dine with my sister. And—please oblige me—I really want you to go to Madame Drouet.

My husband will wish it. He has very few amusements here; and I assure you, you will laugh, you will be entertained.'

"I looked at my cousin in the pale shadow thrown by the heavy folds of the curtains. Her forehead was white as marble; her lips were colourless; there was no expression in her eyes. I drew my chair near to hers, and we had a long, long talk. The hour was getting late, and all our thoughts were melancholy."

Yet, when the talk was over, M. Asseline crossed the road to the "discreet house" in which the "incomparable artist" maintained his Muse, and admired her "magnificent tresses of white hair." She showed, he thought, "perfect dignity in a delicate situation."

"Her graces made a great impression on me. She lifted her glass and said—

"'Let us drink to your cousin's health.' . . . I had to thank her for many delightful evenings."

One would infer from that that the two women never met; and they probably did not meet very often. Still, there is a record of one meeting, at a banquet given in Victor Hugo's honour by Lacroix, the publisher of *Les Misérables*. Lacroix had hesitated—it is M. Adolphe Brisson who tells the story—to send invitations to both ladies; but Madame Hugo, when approached upon the subject, had replied that he might do so.

"The hint was taken. The venerable Madame Lacroix recollects every detail of the memorable feast.

Madame Hugo and Madame Drouet sat respectively on the host's right and left. The conversation, though a little chilly at first, soon became animated. Both ladies seemed to feel at their ease, though, when the dessert was served, there was a shudder of apprehension among the guests. Madame Hugo rose, her glass of champagne in her hand, and, looking around her with a melancholy gaze, smiling her sad smile, she proposed the health of Madame Drouet.

" 'I cannot reproduce her speech,' " said Madame Lacroix. " 'She hardly uttered more than a sentence ; but the taste was exquisite. It conveyed everything : her modesty, her proud dignity, her tender and gentle affection, and the toleration with which she viewed the weaknesses of genius.' "

Truly an amazing story, and an amazing tone for the wife of a man of genius to take—in public. Possibly there was something in it of penitence for her own past lapses, not quite forgotten, though now of such ancient date ; but one may find a fuller and more convincing explanation in the coercive influence of the stronger will. Victor Hugo himself, one cannot help imagining, must have inspired (and perhaps even composed) the speech, just as he had inspired (and to all intents and purposes composed) the biography ; and that is why both of them read like illustrative expositions of the text : " Shall not the judge of all the earth do right ? "

Madame Hugo, when she made her speech, was hardly an old woman ; but she was an invalid, with a failing heart, and she died soon afterwards. It was

the turn of the domestic affections and emotions, and Victor Hugo professed himself heart-broken. "My sobs cannot express themselves in my letters," he wrote to Marie Nodier. "I shall soon follow the great soul who has left us," he wrote to Victor Pavie. Then, having paid his tribute, he returned to Juliette —or rather, to be exact, he brought Juliette to his house to occupy Madame Hugo's place.

He did not marry her, of course—to do that would have been to spoil the picture, and place himself on a level with other men. The wife was the wife, and the Muse was the Muse ; and so it must be till the end of the chapter. Perhaps, if Chateaubriand had spoiled the picture by marrying Madame Récamier—but Chateaubriand had not done so, and Victor Hugo's rôle, at the end of his life, as at the beginning of it, was to be "Chateaubriand or nothing." Madame Récamier had offered to live in Chateaubriand's house without marrying him, believing that the years had consecrated the *liaison*, and that the world would think no evil. Juliette —Madame Récamier also, it will be remembered, was called Juliette—came to live in Victor Hugo's house, for the same reasons, and with the same confident expectations.

Expectations, it should at once be added, which were fully justified. If there were any murmurs of criticism, they were drowned by the chorus of approval, or at least powerless against the general feeling that Victor Hugo was so great and good that whatever he did must necessarily be right because he did it. No one raked up the past. No one ventured to assert—at all events in accents loud enough to be heard—that the author of *L'art d'être grand-père* had selected a

queer companion for his grandchildren in the person of a lady with such a record as Juliette's—a tailor's daughter, who had become a theatrical show girl, a light o' love, and his own acknowledged mistress during his wife's lifetime. It was agreed, on the contrary, to revere him in the double character of a model grandfather and a perfect lover : a Dante equally entitled to his Beatrice and to his respectable reputation.

Even so, it seems, the course of true love did not run quite smoothly. Victor Hugo was weak, and Juliette had an imperious and explosive temper. The story, already told, of Blanche belongs to this period ; and there were others. It is recorded by Madame Richard-Lesclide that a physician once advised the aged poet that he would, like King David of old, find the embraces of a maidservant a stimulating tonic. Juliette naturally did not like that ; and it is also related that, every now and again, she found packets of compromising letters in the poet's desk, and judged it necessary to tear them up with angry ululations, and scatter the fragments to the winds. Nor was it an unknown thing for Juliette to remonstrate openly with ladies whose adulation of the Master looked to her as if it were about to express itself in caresses.

These clouds on the sky, however, were only visible to the most intimate friends of the house. For the rest of the world the sky was clear and blue ; and the sun and the moon filled it, obscuring all the other stars and planets in the celestial firmament. Juliette "had charge of the department of the invitations" ; and Victor Hugo gave it out that no one might call himself a friend of his who was not also a friend of hers. He "received" in her suite more often than in his own.

They kept up their dignity by addressing each other in public as Monsieur and Madame (though in private they were "Victor" and "Juju"); and their salon was the most ostentatious of all the literary salons in Paris. Admirers intrigued for invitations to visit the Master's mistress in the same spirit in which women elsewhere intrigue for the privilege of being presented at Court.

Which is to say that Victor Hugo had, by relentless perseverance and unrivalled force of character, achieved a feat which any other man would have found impossible. He had not only taken a show girl from a theatre and made her his mistress—a thing which any man might do; he had made her his mistress at his friends' expense, amid their applause and approbation; he had promoted her from the rank of mistress to that of Muse; and he had imposed his Muse upon his family, and his wife's family, and upon society, and had made her, in spite of her left-handed status, an acknowledged and respected public institution—a kind of exalted "functionary" in the world of letters.

She predeceased him; and all his friends were at her funeral; and she was honoured with necrologies in the most prominent columns of the leading papers.

"The white-haired woman whom we have lost," wrote M. Jules Claretie in *Le Temps*, "will be inseparably associated in literary annals with the imperishable memory of Victor Hugo. There is a majestic dignity in the figure which she presents to us."

Truly the edifice of the Hugo legend was com-

plete, and the coping-stone had been placed upon it when those lines were written. One might end with them; but perhaps it is more fitting to end with Victor Hugo's last entry in the *Livre de l'Anniversaire*—

"Yes," we there read, "this book contains your life and mine. When I write in it, it seems to me that I am adding sanctity to our hours of love and eternity to our span of time. God sees us, and blesses us—I feel sure of that. One would say, in this glorious weather, that the sun wants to be of our party, and that a great festival in heaven above corresponds with our humble festival below. 'I love you'—that is the great word. God said it at the creation, and it is echoed by all created things. I love you, my angel, whom I adore. Let us commence our fiftieth year together with this divine saying: 'I love you.'"

These are eloquent words, and it is hard to believe that the heart did not speak in them. They would come fittingly as the climax of the most romantic story to be found in the annals of Romance. As the climax of such a story as we have analyzed—but let us not insist. For the supreme achievement of Victor Hugo's genius, after all, is this: that he did compel the world to accept him at his own valuation, and to agree, not only that whatever he did was right, but also that whatever he did was romantic. The materials out of which he built his romance were very far from romantic—they were the materials which we have seen. If any other man had tried to begin a romantic career by taking over a friend's cast-off mistress in consideration of the payment of a sum of money, one knows what

the world would have said ; but in Victor Hugo's case the world did not say it. He conquered opinion by the eloquence of his assertions and the magnificence of his gestures, silenced objectors by knitting his Olympian brows, and, waving, as it were, a magician's wand, triumphantly transformed the ridiculous into the sublime.

And that not only in the case of the remarkable story of his own romance with Juliette, but also in the case of the story of his and Madame Hugo's relations with Sainte-Beuve, which must be treated in a separate chapter.

CHAPTER XXV

Victor Hugo's sonnet on Sainte-Beuve's treachery—Flaws in the argument of that sonnet—Sainte-Beuve's origin and early amours—His medical studies—His introduction to the staff of the *Globe*—Victor Hugo seeks his acquaintance—He becomes the trumpeter of the Romantic Movement—Sympathy between him and Madame Hugo—They sit in corners and talk about religion.

"THIS is only to be published if the libel appears. If it does not appear, the scoundrel's shade is to be spared."

That was the direction to the literary executors, attached to the manuscript of a sonnet found among Victor Hugo's papers. The text of the sonnet, dedicated "to S.-B.," is as follows—

Que dit-on? on m'annonce un libelle posthume
De toi? C'est bien. Ta fange est faite d'amertume;
Rien de toi ne m'étonne, ô fourbe tortueux.
Je n'ai point oublié ton regard monstrueux,
Le jour où je te mis hors de chez moi, vil drôle,
Et que sur l'escalier te poussant par l'épaule,
Je te dis: "N'entrez plus, monsieur, dans ma maison!"
Je vis luire en tes yeux toute ta trahison.
J'aperçus ta fureur dans ta peur, ô coupable,
Et je compris de quoi pouvait être capable
Ta lâcheté changée en haine, le dégoût
Qu'a d'elle-même une âme ou s'amasse un égout
Et ce que méditait ta laideur dédaignée!
Car on presse la toile en voyant l'araignée!

The lines burn, and are meant to burn, like vitriol.

SAINTE-BEUVE

[*To face p.* 226

The sense of them is that Sainte-Beuve was as ugly as a spider, and like a spider spun filthy webs; that he presumed to make advances to Madame Hugo in Victor Hugo's house; that Madame Hugo would have nothing to say to him, being disgusted by his repellent visage; that Victor Hugo had found him out, and kicked him out; that Sainte-Beuve had avenged himself by boasting, in a posthumous publication, of a success which he had not, in fact, achieved; that things had passed, in short, as in a melodrama, with the critic in the rôle of the grotesque discomfited villain, and Victor Hugo in that of the outraged hero redressing wrong and putting vice to shame. Which is to say that Victor Hugo found material for the embellishment of the Hugo legend even in the tragedy of his married life.

For things by no means happened exactly as the poem represents. Sainte-Beuve was by no means so repulsive, Madame Hugo by no means so innocent, and Victor Hugo himself by no means so chivalrously virtuous as this corrosive eloquence declares. The story of Victor Hugo and Juliette, which we have just had before us, needs to be read concurrently with the story of Sainte-Beuve and Madame Hugo. The proverb which tells us that when the cat is away the mice will play, needs to be remembered in connection with both of them; and the conclusion of the matter is that, though there certainly was a drama, it was an intricate and tangled drama, and one in which there was no *beau rôle* for any one concerned. We will come to it in a moment, but must first say an introductory word or two about Sainte-Beuve as a preface to it.

Sainte-Beuve was an old man's child, born at Boulogne-sur-Mer in December 1804. His father, who had held high posts in the "octroi," died in the same year; and his mother, who was of English extraction, brought him up in his native town on an income of about £160 a year. Equally interested in religion and in his studies, he won prizes at school and made "a good first communion." He continued to win prizes at a more advanced school to which he was sent in Paris; and when the problem of choosing a career presented itself, he decided to become a doctor, and commenced his studies at the Saint-Louis Hospital.

The science of medicine interested him—he always felt that his methods of criticism owed a good deal to his knowledge of physiology; but the actual practice of the art did not attract him. He saw visions and dreamed dreams, and could not, therefore, look forward with serene satisfaction to a career spent in the bandaging of sore legs and the cultivation of a good bedside manner. His chance of getting out of it came when his old school-master, Paul Dubois, having been turned out of the school on account of his religious opinions, founded the *Globe*—announced as "journal littéraire"—and invited the most brilliant of his former pupils to join his staff.

That was in 1824. The young critic learnt his business in the *Globe* office, and it was through his connection with the *Globe* that, three years later, he made Victor Hugo's acquaintance.

Hugo, of course, with his eye, as ever, on the legend, gives out that Sainte-Beuve "approached him" in the character of a literary reporter, pros-

trating himself at the feet of genius, soliciting crumbs of speech which could be kneaded into "copy." Equally, of course, Sainte-Beuve did nothing of the kind. "Even in my youth," he writes, "I was too much the critic to throw myself into the arms of any author of whom I might have to write." Hugo, he adds, called first, to thank him for a favourable "notice," but happened to find him out. He returned the visit, and Hugo made himself so affable that cordial friendship resulted.

It was a useful friendship to both of them, and specially useful to Victor Hugo. He wanted a trumpeter, and Sainte-Beuve was just the sort of trumpeter that he wanted. Though he had been trained as a doctrinaire, he was not of the stuff of which real doctrinaires are made. He was of an age to be dazzled by brilliancy, and swept up by enthusiasms; but he also had enough of the scientific spirit in him to desire to prove to the world that he did well to be dazzled, and that his enthusiasms were firmly grounded.

He was not, indeed, as yet a disciple. The traditions of the *Globe* office—literary as well as political and religious—were the traditions of the eighteenth century, and Sainte-Beuve seemed to have accepted them. He was tired, however, of being treated as a small boy by his editor and former preceptor, and quite ready to assert his independence and enlist under a new flag. Moreover, he wrote verses—a weakness in which the other doctrinaires of the *Globe* did not indulge—and that settled it. Victor Hugo read his verses and praised them. "From that time forward," he writes, "I was

won over to the branch of the Romantic School of which he was the acknowledged leader."

A time was to come when he would, by implication, withdraw that statement, averring that he had never followed in the train of Victor Hugo, "unless it were for a moment under the influence of a charm"—the charm, that is to say, of Victor Hugo's wife; but there his memory was at fault. He wrote of Victor Hugo at the time as "our great Victor"; and he blew his trumpet, and professed his creed, tracing, so to say, the genealogy of the Romantic Movement, and establishing its legitimacy as a literary development—a throwback, as it were, to the work of the Pleiad, and a continuation of a movement temporarily interrupted by a misdirected imitation of the writers of antiquity.

Later, it is true, he changed his mind about Romanticism, as about a good many other things; but at the moment he was an ideal fugleman, bringing scholarship to bear where scholarship was badly needed. He called, as it were, for order for the Romantics, and insisted that they should be given a respectful hearing in spite of their extravagances. Victor Hugo, therefore, owed a great deal to him; though it is equally true that he, on his part, owed a great deal to Victor Hugo and the new associations to which Victor Hugo introduced him. He had been in a groove, and now he was taken out of it. He had lived like a hermit among doctrinaires; and now he was admitted to a society of clever and high-spirited young men and young women, who not only admired each other's literary compositions, but also called each other by their Christian names.

His age was three-and-twenty. It would, indeed,

have been strange if he had not now fallen in love—whether *pour le bon motif* or otherwise. Seeing that he was a poor man, compelled to count the francs, the "otherwise" was the more probable alternative of the two; and so it happened.

Of course he had been in love before; but not very seriously. He had begun, as most men begin, by loving his neighbour's daughter, long before it entered into his dreams to love his neighbour's wife. But he was a child, and she was a child in their kingdom by the sea; and marriage was out of the question; so that the romance soon came to an end, leaving only a memory which it was pleasant to play with. Probably Sainte-Beuve played with it with the more morbid pleasure because, just as he was reaching years of adolescence, he realized that he was ugly. He made the discovery, he tells us, at the age of seventeen, and was seized with "icy despair."

"I tried to smile, and compose myself," he proceeds, "but I might almost say that I no longer 'lived.' At some moments I wondered that others did not seem to notice the same changes in my face which I myself saw in it; but then I thought I detected some inquisitive or mocking quality in every glance directed at me. I continually compared my face with the faces of other young persons of my acquaintance, and felt envious of the faces of the biggest fools among them. For whole weeks I was tortured by the fear that I should never be loved, but should be deprived of all raptures of the kind by the rapid progress of my ugliness."

A face of that sort, conjoined with strong physical desires, is indeed an unfortunate inheritance. It leads, almost inevitably, to venal amours with the Pandemian of the pavement. Sainte-Beuve has left it on record that he haunted the galleries of the Palais Royal, where the Pandemians of that day displayed their charms for the temptation of the amorous : that at first he feared the perils of the adventure and only dared to look ; that at last he made the plunge—"absurdly, without discrimination, for no other reason than because I had made up my mind that I would"—and that the frequentation of the Pandemian became a habit with him.

It must often happen so—for otherwise there would not be many Pandemians ; and the confession is of no consequence except in so far as it helps us to picture Sainte-Beuve in the days when he stood timorously on the threshold of romance. His life, like Rousseau's, was to be a moral, emotional, and intellectual evolution ; he was to proceed to cynicism and scepticism by slow steps ; and no one would have recognized in him as yet the man that he was ultimately to become.

He was at once very vain and very shy : quite sure that he was clever, but by no means so sure of his ability to cut a striking figure, and make a good impression. If his intellect was masculine, his temperament was somewhat feminine. He could blush like a woman, and fly into passions like a woman ; and he had, as we have just seen, a woman's exquisite sensitiveness as to his personal appearance. He felt the need of sympathy, and of religion ; he also felt the need of being taken by the hand and reassured both as to his social and as to his literary qualities—to

be accepted as a gentleman as well as a scholar, and a poet as well as a gentleman.

All those advantages awaited him at the *cénacle;* for the Romantics, needing their trumpeter badly, had every inducement to make much of him in order that he might blow with a will when he put his trumpet to his lips. He really was a poet as well as a critic—it was precisely because he was also a poet that in the end he became so good a critic. His new friends praised his poetry in order to encourage him to praise theirs; and they had the best of the bargain, since Sainte-Beuve was the only member of the group who was earning his living as a critic and knew how to impart an air of sweet-reasonableness to his panegyrics. Even while they exploited him, or thought that they were doing so, they treated him as one of themselves —and not the least important of them. He and Victor Hugo used to meet twice a day.

And yet, it would seem, he had his qualms, his hesitations, his anxieties. His ugliness was one of his troubles. He looked, according to Victor Pavie, "like an elementary school-master or a provincial notary"—figures with which it rarely occurs to any of us to associate visions of romance. Moreover, he was making his reputation more slowly than his friends, and cut a less dazzling figure even in the eyes of people who did not know him by sight. The man in the street turned round to look at Victor Hugo, but not at him. Actresses threw themselves into the arms of Alfred de Vigny, but not into his. His passion for romance was intense; and yet he felt himself a slighted, subsidiary personage. Consequently he was bound to fall in love with any beautiful woman who

made it clear that she took an interest in him ; and presently Madame Hugo did this.

She too, for all her beauty, was a subsidiary personage in the Romantic circle ; not a Muse, but a domesticated woman, a good mother, and a good Catholic. Her husband had raised her on to a pinnacle by insisting that she alone of the women of the Romantic group must not be addressed by all and sundry by her Christian name ; but having placed her on her pinnacle, he frequently left her to mope on it.

There are reasons for all things ; and no doubt there was a reason for that. It was an article of faith in the Romantic circle that Madame Hugo was silly ; and though the charge was hardly true, she was at no particular pains to disprove it. She sometimes interrupted the flow of soul with irrelevant trivialities concerning the servants and the children. It is said that Victor Hugo cowed her with leonine glances when she did so ; and a woman whose husband intimidates her in public with implied charges of stupidity is apt to be grateful to any man, however ugly, who demonstrates, or insinuates, that he, at all events, does not find her stupid.

Sainte-Beuve did so—the link between them being, of all things in the world, religion. He and Madame Hugo formed a habit of sitting in corners together, to talk about religion : she ready to convert him to Romantic neo-Catholicism—which was the only aspect of the Romantic Movement that she really understood and cared about—and he equally ready to be converted. That was the beginning of an intimacy which was, at a later date, to have grave consequences.

CHAPTER XXVI

Sainte-Beuve's friendship for Madame Hugo—Victor Hugo's neglect of her—He laughs at the idea of Sainte-Beuve's rivalry—Yet sympathizes—Madame Hugo confesses that she loves Sainte-Beuve—Correspondence between the husband and the lover.

THE time was to come when Sainte-Beuve, having grown into a cynic, would write of adultery as "a very commonplace matter seldom entailing any serious consequences"; but he was very far from that frivolity in the early days of his acquaintance with Madame Hugo.

There was no *coup de foudre*—no instantaneous and irresistible temptation, nor even, at first, any deliberate siege of the heart of his friend's wife. He and she did really talk about religion, both of them being really interested in the subject,—she as a *dévote*, he as a poet who felt that the materialism of the doctrinaires lacked "inwardness," and sincerely desired to spiritualize his view of life. What happened afterwards may have been the inevitable result of Sainte-Beuve's passion for romance, so intense and so long unsatisfied, and Madame Hugo's feeling that her husband neglected her; but they hardly realized that it was inevitable before they found it happening, and even then they resisted. The progress of the drama was slow, extending over a good many years.

The documents which would have enabled us to

trace the story step by step have disappeared. They were contained in two boxes which Sainte-Beuve, shortly before his death, handed to M. Paul Chéron of the Bibliothèque Nationale—"for the defence of my memory, should the need arise"; but M. Chéron, instead of preserving the papers under seal, tumbled them out of their boxes, and burnt them: a breach of trust which may or may not have been "judicious," but, at any rate, leaves his biographers to defend Sainte-Beuve's memory, in so far as it is defensible, from other sources, and by other means. It has been assailed with so much venom, and Victor Hugo, in spite of Claire and Blanche and Juliette and Madame Biard, has received so much support in his self-righteousness, that one would like to present the case as favourably as possible.

It seems clear, at any rate, that Madame Hugo was in no hurry to throw herself into Sainte-Beuve's arms. She saw in him at first only a social nonentity to whom it was well to be polite because her husband found him useful. At the next stage, he was a shy and ugly little man—a lame dog to be helped over the social stiles. Then came the discovery that they had a common interest in religion, and that she whom the others treated as a silly woman—"with nothing of the queen of letters about her except the carriage of her head"—could really talk helpfully on the gravest subjects to one very clever man.

In after days, in retrospect, Saint-Beuve seems to have come round to the conventional view of Madame Hugo's intelligence. "When one is young," he then wrote in his diary, "one easily forgives the lack of intelligence on the part of a beautiful woman whom

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one loves. . . . I have experienced that." Most likely, however, instead of forgiving the lack of intelligence, he did not, at the time, perceive it. At all events, he formed the habit of calling, nearly every day, to have his little talk with Madame Hugo about religion ; and she, on her part, formed the habit of expecting him, and of scolding him if, for any reason, he failed to come.

That sort of thing seems to have gone on for about three years. They were too close to Romanticism to generalize about it, or to understand that, in overstrung, romantic hearts, religion and love were two modes of the same spiritual activity ; and it is impossible to say at what point, or at what date, love surprised them in the midst of their religious conversations. It grew gradually out of habit and the exchange of confidences. They could not help themselves, and they meant no harm. It was pleasant to be sentimental, and it was the fashion to be morbid. Why not indulge themselves, understanding each other's veiled allusions, but always drawing the line in time, and never speaking the compromising words which could not be retracted? So they seem to have reasoned, playing with the fire, proposing to warm their hands, but not to burn their fingers.

Sainte-Beuve seems to have been the first of the two to realize that fire not only could burn but generally did. He travelled a good deal towards the end of his three years—not solely, one feels sure, for the purpose of admiring scenery and studying the manners of foreign peoples. Perhaps he wanted to test his love by absence—perhaps to live it down with stoic heroism—perhaps, which seems more likely, to

indulge a morbid train of thought in solitude. He dropped, at any rate, mysterious hints to his friends about the hopeless passion which tortured him; and he began to write morbid poems, and morbid works of fiction. One must think of him as very young, somewhat unhappy—and yet disposed to be proud of his unhappiness as a proof of his "sensibility."

His friends did not take the meaning of his hints yet, though they were to understand them presently. Ulric Guttinguer,[1] for one, put an entirely mistaken sense on one of the poems in his *Consolations*, supposing him merely to be downcast because the *cénacle* had been invaded by the vulgar herd of Victor Hugo's admirers.

"Now that I have read your lines: *To two absent friends*," he wrote, "I can well enter into your melancholy and your discouragement when you see their nest so noisy and so crowded with good-for-nothing intruders. What! You can no longer be alone with those whom you love so well? 'Tis sad; 'tis very sad indeed."

Victor Hugo, too, was quite without suspicions. He could not think of his wife otherwise than as his own echo or shadow. He could not think of his friend otherwise than as his advertising agent, who not only reviewed him favourably, but also wrote prospectuses, anonymously, for his Publicity Department. Victor Hugo was great; Sainte-Beuve was his prophet, who

[1] Ulric Guttinguer of Rouen (1786–1865) was one of the elderly sympathizers with the Romantic Movement: a poet, though of no great distinctions, and a man of means and leisure.

explained how great he was. That was the position, as Victor Hugo saw it; so he naturally missed his absent advertising agent, and told his wife to write and urge him to return to his duties. Madame Hugo—so ran the message—was "delighted to be entrusted with the task of writing"; and the correspondents continued—

"So here are our two letters of four pages, half dictated by me and half composed by her: two letters full of heart and regret, calling aloud to you to come back to us."

He came—but not at once: not until after the July Revolution, which broke out when he was in Normandy. Or rather, to be accurate, he came, but quickly went away again; and one of his letters to Victor Pavie shows him still struggling with his emotions. He writes in it of his "horrible mental anguish"; he protests that he is not loved as he could wish to be, or with the intensity with which he loves, himself, and that all his life is out of gear in consequence. "When I was still a child," he proceeds, "love was the one happiness in life of which I dreamed. I have not obtained it; I have not fully felt it." And so "farewell to poetry!" Et cetera; though, of course, while he was bidding poetry farewell, he was also writing it, and getting it printed. The lines beginning "Va, si tu veux aimer, tu n'as point passé l'âge" belong to this period; and he also wrote about himself in prose, under the name of Joseph Delorme, in the *Globe*, celebrating the happiness of his friends, to whose child he had just stood as godfather, and proceeding—

"But as for poor Joseph, there could be no joy of that sort for him; and he had not the strength to tide him over the crises of his life, dissolved, as he was, in the flood of his own tears."

It was meant, we cannot doubt, to convey a message to Madame Hugo; and there are those who believe that Victor Hugo also divined its meaning. The story is told that he called on Sainte-Beuve, and found him in tears, and asked him why he wept, and extracted the confession of his love from him, and, instead of being angry, burst into a roar of laughter.

He may have done so. Being capable of everything, he must also have been capable of that. Knowing, for so many had told him so, that he himself looked like an Olympian god, and perceiving Sainte-Beuve to be an ugly, insignificant little man, he may have thought the rivalry ridiculous, and ridicule the best weapon to use against it. And so he wrote—

"We need not bury our friendship, but must keep it chaste and holy as it has always been, and be indulgent to each other. I have my wound, and you have yours; but the effect of the painful shock will pass. Time will heal everything. Let us hope that, some day, we shall find, in what has happened, only a reason for loving each other better. My wife has read your letter. Come and see us often, and write regularly. Reflect that, after all, you have no better friend in the world than me."

The letter may, of course, have been inspired by some other incident—some literary quarrel, for example. If one were dealing with any one but Victor Hugo, one would say that it must have been. No

other man would have tried to console his wife's lover for her indifference by inviting him to come and see her; but to Victor Hugo the ordinary rules do not apply. His vanity had made him pachydermatous; his self-respect would not allow him to pay Sainte-Beuve the compliment of being jealous. First mockery, then magnanimity—that was the course of treatment. He adopted it; but presently he discovered his wife also dissolved in tears.

He had, in the past, admired her tears, and found inspiration in them. Only a short while since, he had expressed his sense of the beauty of her tears in verse—

"Pleure! Les pleurs vont bien, même au bonheur; tes chants
Sont plus doux dans les pleurs; tes yeux purs et touchants
Sont plus beaux quand tu les essuies."

Now, however, it occurred to him to ask her why she was crying, and she told him.

He seems to have had as much difficulty in believing her as Rawdon Crawley had in believing Becky Sharp. No doubt Sainte-Beuve seemed as impossible a rival to him as the Marquis of Steyn seemed to Becky's husband. He was a better poet than Sainte-Beuve; he cut a nobler figure in the world; he was accustomed—whereas Sainte-Beuve was not—to see women sighing at his feet. Moreover, he did not want a scandal, and did not see the need of one; and he did not understand that women are not satisfied to be taken for granted, and that an ugly man's insinuating devotion may count more for them than a handsome man's patronage and prestige. Nor did he perceive that Sainte-Beuve was dangerous because he placed himself on Madame Hugo's intellectual level. It seemed

to him that he had only to wave his hand magnanimously in order to restore the calm.

We see him waving it, to the best of his ability, in letter after letter, believing the best because his dignity requires it, taking somewhat the tone of a parent who rebukes naughty children but means to forgive them, yet compelled at last to recognize that the plot is thickening under his eyes. He speaks of "the most painful occasion in my life," and of "the moment when I had to choose between you and her"; but he also encourages Sainte-Beuve to try to live down his unfortunate attachment, and holds out the hope that, when he has done so, all shall be as before, associating Madame Hugo with his sentiments—

"My wife and I," he writes, "read your letters together with the friendliest feelings. The times of which you remind me were very pleasant. Shall we never see such times again? I hope we shall. It will always be a delight to me to meet you, and to write to you. There are only two or three things really worth having in life, and friendship is one of them. Let us continue to write. . . . The tie between us is not broken."

Which is to say that Victor Hugo surveys Sainte-Beuve's conduct more in sorrow than in anger—pitying him as a man who must needs love the highest when he saw it, but was predestined to love it in vain, and might properly be pardoned when he had performed his penance. He rusticated him, as it were, for a term, and then invited him to come back, exclaiming, "1830 is over."

So Sainte-Beuve came back, and resumed his position as trumpeter. Very possibly it was the trumpeter, even more than the friend, that Victor Hugo had missed. At all events, he now, as M. Michaud puts it, "gave him the opportunity of repairing his faults by making himself useful"; and Sainte-Beuve embraced the opportunity, and did what was required of him, drafting the prospectus of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, and writing for the *Dictionnaire des contemporains* a biography of the poet, which the poet himself dictated, and which is studded with the pretentious misstatements which make up the Hugo legend. But the little rift within the lute, though patched up, widened.

Probably Sainte-Beuve's relations with Madame Hugo were still, at this stage, no more than sentimental. He afterwards, it is true, made a confession in a poem of which something will have to be said; but confessions in poems are not evidence, and a passage in a letter written at the time to his friend, Abbé Barbe, indicates that he was still engaged in the battle with temptation—

"I have had a very painful time during the last few months. I have felt the passion which, previously, I had only dreamt of and desired. It still lasts, and will last; and it has introduced new necessities into my life—sweetness and bitterness commingled, and an obligation of self-sacrifice, which has its good effect, but, nevertheless, imposes a severe strain upon human nature."

That is not the letter of a man who had, as yet,

been "guilty" in the Divorce Court sense; and we may probably dismiss as legend the story that Sainte-Beuve used, at this time, to visit Madame Hugo, disguised as a woman, when Victor Hugo was out, and was detected by the concierge, who one day caught a glimpse of trousers underneath his skirts. Indubitably, however, something in his demeanour began to make Victor Hugo feel uncomfortable—the more so as Sainte-Beuve declined a good appointment which was offered to him at Liège, and which Victor Hugo had urged him to accept; and the next stage is marked by a long letter, from which a short excerpt may suffice—

"Where is our old confidence, our old expansiveness, our old freedom in our comings and goings, our long talks, without ever an *arrière-pensée?* Nothing of all that remains, and all our relations are now a torture to me. The mere obligation imposed upon me by a person whom I must not name here, of always remaining in the room when you call, reminds me unceasingly, and very cruelly, that we are no longer the friends we used to be. . . . So we had better cease to see each other, in order that we may not cease to love each other. I do not know whether your wound is healed; but I do know that mine is not. So let us cease to meet now, in the hope that we may meet again some day—as soon as possible—and never wish to part. The distance between our apartments, our summer excursions, the fact that I am hardly ever at home—there are the excuses that may serve. . . . Burn this letter, my friend, in order that no one, not even you yourself, may ever read it again."

The tone of the letter, it will be noticed, is very different from the tone of the poem quoted at the opening of this section. There is no question in it of crime, or shame, or kicking out, or slinking away; and even the breach of relations proposed in it did not take place. Sainte-Beuve gave reasons, plausible if not true, for not exiling himself to Liège, and Victor Hugo permitted him to blow the trumpet as before. The actual and definite breach did not take place until April 1, 1834, when Hugo wrote—

"My friends have to share with me so much hatred, and so many shameful and cowardly persecutions, that I can quite understand the firmest and oldest friendships breaking down under the strain. So farewell. Let us bury separately, in silence, the sentiment which is already dead in you, and which your letter kills in me."

It is a mysterious letter, and the key to the mystery is nowhere to be found; so that one need only note two things about it. It proves once again that Victor Hugo's poem about Sainte-Beuve was more virulent than veracious; and it was not written until after Juliette Drouet had come into Victor Hugo's life.

CHAPTER XXVII

Madame Hugo comes to know about Juliette—Effect of that knowledge on her relations with Sainte-Beuve—End of her intimacy with Sainte-Beuve—Sainte-Beuve's desperate attempts to win her back—He fails—He also fails to find consolation in religion—"I am looking on at the death of my own heart"—He seeks consolation in poetry—*Le Livre d'Amour*—A copy of the work falls into the hands of Alphonse Karr.

Alexandre Dumas is said to have told an unknown lady, who told a newspaper man, who put the story in the *Figaro*, that it was he who introduced Juliette to Victor Hugo, and that he did so at Madame Hugo's request because her own health was too weak to endure her husband's "leonine" attentions. Dumas was quite capable of effecting the transaction; but he was even more capable of inventing the story, which is inconsistent with Madame Hugo's subsequent behaviour. Victor Hugo, it seems clear, reclaimed his Magdalen on his own responsibility, though not at his own expense; and while he was multiplying his absences, Sainte-Beuve multiplied his calls and his assiduities.

It is said that he told Madame Hugo about Juliette, and so overcame her long resistance. Victor Hugo, however, was flaunting his amours at the time. His secret was *secret de Polichinelle*, and Madame Hugo's relatives were corresponding about it, as we have seen. Whatever Sainte-Beuve may have

whispered or insinuated, he can hardly be arraigned for the betrayal of a confidence. At the most, he can only have confirmed a rumour and added a few circumstantial details; and that, if even as much as that was necessary, sufficed. His pæans and those of Victor Hugo synchronized; and Madame Hugo succumbed —from resentment, it may be, or perhaps from pride, rather than from passion.

These were the years in which Sainte-Beuve began to review Victor Hugo less favourably than of old: the years in which the poet celebrated the merits of his wife and his mistress in the same volume of verse, and the critic pointed out the incongruity of the two kinds of incense. He protests, in his unpublished diary, that Victor Hugo was "insatiable of praise." He declares that, though one served him up a slice of praise as solid as marble every morning, he never failed to digest it in the course of the day and ask for more towards the evening. The truth is, however, that he was ceasing to prepare the dishes of praise with the same delicate tact as of old; and the breach of April 1, 1834, seems to have been the outcome of an inadequate eulogy, as Victor Hugo considered it, published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. The eulogy, the poet wrote, though "immense," was "lacking in cordiality."

He added that Madame Hugo was of the same opinion; but that is nonsense. Madame Hugo, when questioned, denied having said anything whatsoever about the offensive article. Her husband, she said, had dragged her name in "as a trick to serve his interests"; and nothing is more certain than that she did not quarrel with Sainte-Beuve when her husband gave him his dismissal, for we find Sainte-Beuve, six

months after the dismissal, writing from the country, where he has been taking a holiday—

"The state of my finances, my work, and my other engagements only allow me another week's respite. At the end of that time, I must resume the yoke: the yoke of Buloz in the first instance, and then that other yoke mentioned in *Hernani*—'The two arms, etc.'"

He was privileged to bear the yoke, in fact, for two or three years more; and there seems no reason to doubt that he would gladly have continued to bear it to the end of his life. Whatever we may think of his conduct—and it may be necessary to use strong language about that—there is no reason to question the sincerity of his feelings. He had despaired, being so ill-favoured, of ever finding love; and love had come to him. This love was his ewe lamb which he cherished, and which it would break his heart to lose. He wrote sincere poems about it, not meaning them for publication. He stooped, and taught Madame Hugo to stoop, to ruses and low cunning: surreptitious interviews at the houses of common friends, and letters addressed to the *poste restante* under cover of false names. He confided in Guttinguer, who helped him to arrange his assignations, overflowed with sympathy, and kept his secret; and things went on like that until some time in 1836.

What happened then—and how it came to happen—is a mystery to which the lost letters may be presumed to have held the clue. Failing their guidance, we may perhaps find an alternative clue in the story entitled *Madame de Pontivy* which Sainte-Beuve

contributed to the *Revue des Deux Mondes.* "I wrote it," he said, "for her, in order to bring her back to me"; so that we are well within our rights in looking.

"No, it is not true," the story begins, "that love can only reign for a limited time in the heart. It is not true that, after it has dazzled and intoxicated us for a season, it must inevitably wane. It is not true, as some have said, that five years is the longest term allowed by nature to unfettered passion, and that at the end of that time it dwindles and dies away."

Which means, as one supposes, that Madame Hugo had said that "this sort of thing," having gone on for five years, had gone on long enough, and that Sainte-Beuve urged the opposite opinion. Her motives can only be guessed at; but the theory that they were of a religious nature is the most plausible. Sainte-Beuve had no rival, and no successor, in her heart. After he had lived down the violence of his disappointment, he once more became her friend. But, in the meantime, her daughter's "first communion" had turned her thoughts to mysticism; and she could not, like the rest of the Romantics, reconcile religious ecstasy with adulterous intrigue. Religion, it is true, had prompted her to begin the *liaison;* but religion also prompted her to terminate it by reminding her of her duties, not only as a Christian, but as a mother.

In the story we find things worked out rather differently. There, of course, the despairing lover discovers that he has despaired too soon. Love—"the child which seemed to be dead but had only gone to sleep"—is reawakened; and the failing spark is once

more fanned into a flame, never to become extinct. All that, of course, because that was how Sainte-Beuve desired his own story to end ; but the actual end of his story was the end which we have seen, as he sets forth in some striking lines addressed to Alfred de Musset—

"L'amour vint, sérieux pour moi dans son ivresse.
Sous les fleurs tu chantais, raillant ses dons jaloux.
Enfin, un jour, tu crus ! moi j'y croyais sans cesse ;
Sept ans se sont passés . . . ! Alfred, y croyons-nous ?

L'une, ardente, vous prend dans sa soif et vous jette
Comme un fruit qu'on méprise après l'avoir séché.
L'autre, tendre et croyante, un jour devient muette,
Et pleure, et dit que l'astre, en son ciel, s'est couché."

Which is to say, of course, that George Sand and Madame Hugo had, each in their several ways and according to their several natures—the one through excess and the other through defect of passion—taught their lovers to disbelieve in love.

That was the mood in which Sainte-Beuve, disgusted at last with Paris, and glad to get away, went to Lausanne, at Juste Olivier's invitation, to deliver his famous course of lectures on Port Royal and the Jansenists.

He was hard hit, if ever a man was ; in sore need, not only of distraction, but also of consolation. Work, he felt—and his literary labours were indeed Herculean—could supply the former ; and perhaps religion—that religion about which he and Madame Hugo had talked so often—might provide the latter.

Not a religion, of course, which prescribed "works" or imposed austerities ; not the kind of religion, in

short, which came intruding into private life. Sainte-Beuve was too much of a poet, and too little of a Galahad, to approach the throne of grace with the humble and contrite heart to which thoroughgoing religion of that sort is acceptable. What he wanted was rather a living faith which would sanctify his meditations, while leaving him free to adjust works to it according to his taste and fancy. He had tried Catholicism, and it had not helped him ; but perhaps the Protestantism of the Canton de Vaud might serve his purpose ; and perhaps his own lectures might build the bridge affording him a passage from the one camp to the other.

Such was his programme. He recognized that he had failed in love, but believed that he might succeed in religion—especially if he were helped by that sympathetic and broad-minded theologian, Vinet.

He did his best, and Vinet also did his best ; and Lausanne looked on, as at a spectacle, with anxious curiosity. " Is he converted yet ? " and " Do you think he will be converted soon ? " were questions which Vinet had to answer nearly every day ; but the answer, though sometimes hopeful, was never quite satisfactory. The poet wanted to believe ; the love-sick lover wanted to believe ; but the critic was ever on the watch to kill the nascent faith in both of them. Sainte-Beuve had come to Lausanne in quest of a faith ; but when he went away, he had lost the little faith which he had brought with him. He had failed in religion as in love ; and the two failures were mixed up in his mind as in his letters. " I am looking on at the death of my own heart," is a lament which seems to refer to both of them ; while allusions to the lingering pain caused

by the crash of his romantic castle in the air are frequent.

"Love is postponed. Shall I ever resume it? Or have I passed the age for love?" he writes to his friend Marmier. "I must wait, and forget—forget what I believed was going to last for ever. All is definitely over *in that quarter*. I shall never see her or write to her again. Her indifference wounded me terribly. Yes, wounded is the word, for I still feel the pain of the wound."

And then, in a letter to Guttinguer—

"I had made up my mind to the worst when I departed. It was precisely for the purpose of putting an end to it all that I went away. And yet my thoughts went back to her, and the final convulsions of my soul were very terrible. It was only by endless work that I gagged myself, and kept myself, from crying out."

And then again, in a letter written to Guttinguer, after his return to Paris, on July 2, 1838—

"I have seen her once more. Did I feel the truth of those words of La Rochefoucauld's: 'As long as one loves, one forgives'? And yet I think love is all over for me, in that quarter at any rate."

The proof is clear that Sainte-Beuve had not merely pursued gallant adventures in the spirit of a Don Juan or a Lothario, but had really loved and really suffered; and so, as religion, whether Protestant or Catholic, had

proved a broken reed to him, he sought to console himself with poetry, putting together, supplementing, and arranging—above all, arranging—the pieces which make up his shamefully famous *Livre d'Amour:* the work which, though he did not publish it, has done more harm to his reputation than anything else that he ever wrote.

No stress has been laid upon it in the telling of his story, for the reason given—that poetry is not evidence. It may even be added that some of the exaggerated statements contained in the poetry are confuted by other evidence. The writer not only boasts that he embraced his mistress in a closed carriage—a proposition which is credible enough; he also claims to be the father of one of her children—a proposition which dates conclusively rebut. Evidently, therefore, he embroidered his verse to titillate his vanity. He was within his rights, of course, if he was writing only for himself, or only presenting an emotional situation devoid of any intelligible reference to any individual but himself. But, as he named "Adèle," and described her, and described Victor Hugo, and his salon, and his manner of life, with the most minute particularity, no excuse of that sort can be urged on his behalf. All that can be said for him is that he did not intend the poem for general circulation, and that the scandal and publicity were not directly of his making.

He did, it seems, write his poems, in the first instance, for himself alone; and it was also for himself alone, in the first instance, that he put them together in a book, meaning only to publish such of them as contained no compromising references. His idea was to win posthumous glory, after he and Madame Hugo and

her husband were dead. His directions to his literary executors were to that effect.

But he was vain: vain of his successes because they had surprised him; vain of his poetry which he believed to be better, because it was more sincere, than anything that he had ever written before; and so, with the sensitiveness of a neglected poet as well as a discarded lover, he ventured on the slippery slope.

The first step was to print the book: not for publication; not even for private circulation; but merely, so far as one can gauge his sentiments, to see how the thing looked in print. The second thing was to talk about it guardedly, with the result that mysterious hints appeared in one or two newspapers. The third step was to announce the volume, even while withholding it, in the *Bibliographie de la France*, and so make it the subject of inquisitive speculation. The fourth step was to lend copies, as a special favour, to two or three ladies —Madame d'Arbouville, Hortense Allart de Méritens, among others—that they might see "the blood flowing from the wound," and realize of what profundity of passion the writer was capable.

That was all. Sainte-Beuve meant to go no further. But he had reckoned without Alphonse Karr. Somehow or other, a copy of the book—or a fragment of a copy—or something copied from a copy—fell into Alphonse Karr's hands; and Alphonse Karr, just as on the last occasion on which we encountered him in these pages, was looking out for "startling revelations" to entertain the readers of *Les Guêpes*.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Alphonse Karr's review of *Le Livre d'Amour*—Madame Hugo's alleged visit to him—Reasons for disbelieving the story—Sainte-Beuve's sincerity in his distress—His subsequent affairs with daughters of the people—Criticism of Larousse—"Morality was Sainte-Beuve's weak point"—Later relations with Madame Hugo—"The only constant friend I ever had in the world."

Alphonse Karr says that he obtained a copy of the *Livre d'Amour* in proof from a compositor who had stolen it from the highest motives, and brought it to the editor in the hope that he might write something which would prevent the publication of the book and so "save this unhappy woman who is the wife of one of your friends." That story is not true. *Le Livre d'Amour* was set in 1843, and it was not until 1845 that Alphonse Karr took notice of it. The compositor, if compositor there was in the matter, which is not certain, was no chivalrous squire of dames, but a venal rogue bringing stolen goods, rather late in the day, to what he supposed to be the best market; and the editor, so far from trying to nip a scandal in the bud, set to work to make one. This is the text of his article:—

"An Infamy.

"Grimalkin has made a most remarkable discovery. It is a question of an infamous transaction which is

being prepared in the dark by a poet—a sanctimonious saint of a poet.

"The said poet is very ugly. Once in his life he dreamt that he was the lover of a charming and beautiful woman. For those who know the two persons concerned, such a thing would still seem incredible and impossible, even if they knew it to be true.

"The wretched fellow is not satisfied with the privileges which he has usurped, thanks to a fit of madness or despair caused by another's conduct. It is not enough for him to have enjoyed a beautiful woman's favours; he must needs dishonour her too. He feels that that is necessary to make his triumph complete.

"So he has collected in a volume of 101 pages a number of verses, mediocre at the best, which he has written on the subject of his incredible amours. He has made a *dossier* of it, citing proofs in support of his statements, so as to leave on this woman's life just such a shiny, viscous mark as a snail leaves on a rose.

"Not only has he been careful to set forth in his verses such circumstantial family details as remove all doubt as to the identity of the person designated; he has even named her, over and over again. This infamous production, of which one hundred copies have been printed, is to be sealed and deposited with a notary, with directions that it is to be distributed to certain persons whom the writer designates, after his death.

"I hope that, by that time, the readers of this cowardly composition will find the author as ugly as he was during his life.

"This work of hatred is called by its author a *Book of Love*.

"It is useless to ask me for any explanations of these statements. I should refuse them even to my most intimate friends. Even if the author of the book himself asks for any explanation, I shall refuse it.

"In order that this personage may realize that an honest man has his eyes on him and knows what he is doing, I shall here transcribe one of the pieces in his collection. It names no one; but it will prove to him that I am in possession of his secret."

This sonnet is then quoted—

"Laisse ta tête, amie, en mes mains retenue,
Laisse ton front pressé; nul oeil ne peut nous voir.
Par ce beau froid d'hiver, une heure avant le soir,
Si la foule élégante émaille l'avenue,
Ne baisse aucun rideau, de peur d'être connue;
Car en ce gîte errant, en entrant nous asseoir,
Vois! notre humide haleine, ainsi qu'en un miroir,
Sur la vitre levée a suspendu sa nue.

Chaque soupir nous cache, et nous passons voilés.
Tel, au sommet des monts sacrés et recélés,
A la voix du désir le Dieu faisait descendre
Quelque nuage d'or fluidement épars,
Un voile de vapeur impénétrable et tendre:
L'Olympe et le soleil y perdaient leurs regards."

And then the commentator proceeds—

"This is only an ugly erotic description of a drive in a woman's company; but, three pages before we come to the description, the woman's identity is clearly indicated, and, three pages farther on, she is named.

"One finds in this collection the dates of the meetings, and the address at which they took place. One could easily find one's way to it. No single particular is omitted from the *dossier*.

"Let me express two hopes, of which the first is that this disclosure may prevent the author from proceeding further with his infamous design.

"And let me also hope, still more sincerely, that the volume is all a dream or a lie, and that if the author had ever experienced the love of which he speaks —or, more especially, if he had inspired it—his soul would have been purified in the sacred flame, and he would have been rendered incapable of such an action: an action which is even more odious than I dare to say in my fear of instructing others besides himself."

Articles of that kind, as we all know, make far more mischief than they avert; and it was so in this instance. The scandal which had hitherto been whispered in boudoirs being now shouted in the streets, albeit with no names attached, everybody wanted to know who was involved in it, and everybody who was anybody could easily find out. The situation was quite as awkward for the lady whose virtue the journalist had defended as for the lover whose indefensible conduct he had assailed; and the one really remarkable feature of the story is the self-complacent self-righteousness with which Alphonse Karr regarded his own share in the business.

He returned to the subject, and related the sequel, in the *Livre de Bord*, a volume of reminiscences which he published after Sainte-Beuve's death, but while Victor Hugo was still alive. His article, he says, had hardly been printed when, at nine o'clock in the morning, a visitor knocked at his door. He expected to see Sainte-Beuve; but it was "the poor woman herself" who had come to see him. He hastened to

assure her that he did not believe a word of the charges to which he had given publicity; and he really seems to have thought that that assurance ought to have sufficed to pacify an indignant lady and justify his own proceedings. He adds that Madame Hugo had called on him, not to complain, but to confess.

"You are wrong," she said, turning pale, and speaking with solemn accents. "You are wrong to disbelieve it. It is quite true; but I want to tell you how it came about. He was my husband's most intimate friend——"

She went on to speak of Victor Hugo's sudden passion for Juliette. It was from Sainte-Beuve, she said, that she had heard of it. She had disbelieved it at first, and had demanded proofs. Sainte-Beuve had stolen the proofs from her husband and brought them to her; and then, convinced at last, she had said to him—

"I wish to avenge myself, but I do not wish my vengeance to be attributed to a vicious, or even a frivolous, disposition. I wish the partner of my fault to be a man whom no one can accuse me of loving—a man by whom it will seem incredible that I can have been attracted. I propose, therefore, to choose the ugliest, the most disagreeable, the most tiresome, the most treacherous, the most repulsive man, both physically and morally, whom I know. That is to say, my thoughts turn to you. So tell me: Would you care to be my lover?"

Credat Judæus Apella! is the first obvious comment on that; and the second is a reflection, not easy to

express in printable language, on the egregiousness of the narrator. There never was a man, one would say, who had more of the characteristic vices of the very worst type of society journalist than Alphonse Karr, or a man who behaved like a blackguard with so easy a conscience, or so much as a matter of course. The idea that Madame Hugo would have selected such a man as the recipient of such confidences is as preposterous as the alleged confidences themselves; and the whole of her subsequent conduct is, in fact, an implied refutation of the garrulous old man's shameless statements.

Estranged from Sainte-Beuve, for the time, she nevertheless, as we shall see, in the end became his friend again. That would have been incredible, if he had boasted of favours which he had not enjoyed—and equally incredible if she had addressed him in such words as Alphonse Karr reports. It is only credible, in short, on one assumption: that she had really loved him; that his love had really consoled her in an hour of trouble; that she believed either that he had not meant to boast, or else that he had as much right to boast as Victor Hugo himself who did not cease to celebrate her rival, the Magdalen of the *coulisses;* that she felt, on reflection, that all the real blame for all the trouble which had arisen was attributable to her self-appointed champion, the unconscionable Alphonse Karr.

Nor is it less certain that Sainte-Beuve had really loved Madame Hugo; that his passion for her was the one real passion of his life; and that all his subsequent passions were passions for the second-best or

worse. He certainly was not in love with anything beyond the idea of domesticity when he proposed marriage to General Pelletier's daughter. He uttered no piercing shrieks—and felt no need for uttering any—when she declined him. Madame Olivier does not seem to have been anything more than his very good friend; and the affair with Hortense Allart de Méritens was only the passing salute of two free-lances.

Madame d'Arbouville, it may be, meant more to him, and very possibly he meant more to her. He hastened from Liège, where he was giving his lectures on Chateaubriand, when he heard that she was dying; she alleged religious scruples and would not admit him to her bedside. That is practically all that we know for certain about his relations with her; and the facts do seem to warrant the inference that a deeper sentiment than mere friendship had been involved. The love, however, if love there had been, was an autumnal love. The end of it called forth no agonizing cries, and left no gaping wound; and Sainte-Beuve's subsequent amorous proceedings had nothing about them that can properly be called sentimental.

He had lost his illusions, and he did not pretend that he had retained them. His serious interests were in his studies; the rest was merely a concession to the crude principle that it is not good for man to live alone. His mistresses were the daughters of the people; and most of them behaved accordingly. Some of the stories about some of them are rather quaint, though of no particular importance.

One daughter of the people, for example, was no

sooner installed in the critic's house than she proceeded to have her initials placed, instead of his, on his plate and table linen, with a view of claiming them as her own if ever the hour of separation came. She died, as it happened, in his house, before the question of ownership was raised; but her father, a labouring man from Picardy, who came to her funeral, was enabled by her ruse to blackmail Sainte-Beuve to the tune of £480.

The offence of another daughter of the people was that she handed Sainte-Beuve's wine out of window to the drivers and conductors of all the omnibuses that passed the door. Her proceedings were discovered when the bill came in, and Sainte-Beuve, flying into one of his fits of passion, hustled her straight out into the street. She stood there screaming, clamouring for her clothes and other belongings; but Sainte-Beuve refused to readmit her. He mounted, instead, to her bedroom, turned out her drawers, and flung her hats, her skirts, her boots, her night-dresses, and her underclothing out of window; while the passing populace looked on in respectful amazement, having never seen so great a man occupied in such a task before.

On the whole, however, he treated the daughters of the people well. He was sometimes seen in his box at the theatre with ladies whom his friends had seen dancing the dances of the Apaches in the ballrooms of the Butte Montmartre. He was also seen driving with such ladies in the Bois de Boulogne, and was even known to take them into society with him, pretending that they were his "nieces." Probably it was of such incidents as those that his biographer in the *Grand Dictionnaire Larousse* was thinking when he wrote

that "morality was Sainte-Beuve's weak point"; but Sainte-Beuve meant no harm, and had his defence.

"Oh, yes, my friend," he said, "I know I am getting on in years, and I know that people think me a wiser man than I am, and I wish I were. But do I not at least show a little wisdom in this? Clady is pretty; she is young; she smiles on me. I look at her; I *hardly* do more than look at her; but I admit that I find the occupation pleasant. I like to see her near me. I like to take her out, on sunny days, and hear her laugh. And why not? It gives me the illusion, for a moment, that I have recovered my lost youth."

That was his own point of view; and the point of view of the world was perhaps contained in the "character sketch" of him written by Princess Julie Bonaparte. The princess had sent him a bundle of her literary compositions, asking for his opinion of them; and the character sketch had, by accident, been left among the other manuscripts. He picked it up, and read: "In spite of his great age, he lives a debauched life, and has three women living with him in the house at once." He returned the manuscripts with a note, denying "the truly Herculean legend," and concluding: "Let me beg you, princess, to accept the definitive homage of a respect which is not likely to find any further opportunity of expressing itself."

All that, of course, has nothing to do with Madame Hugo; but she still remained Sainte-Beuve's occasional, but precious, link with the past—that golden

age, so full of gloriously romantic dreams: dreams which had had such a melancholy awakening for all of them. She wrote to him from time to time—even going a little out of her way to make a pretext for writing, as when she told him that she was putting on paper her recollections of their common friend, Alfred de Vigny, and asked him to send her his own article on the subject.

"Literary criticism, of which I know nothing and you know everything," she wrote, "does not enter into my plan; but what you have written will give me facts, and dates, and a general appreciation which will be useful to me—and then, you see, *I shall be reading you.*"

"Thanks," she wrote again, in acknowledging the receipt of the article, "for the happy hours which I owe to you;" and she subscribed herself: "Yours, with all my heart."

Presently, when she came to Paris, she called. Sainte-Beuve's last secretary, M. Jules Troubat, says that she never came to Paris without calling; and of one of the visits, another secretary, M. Pons, was a witness—

"One day, when I was with him, there arrived a lady who evidently knew her way, and, after giving the servant her name, ran quickly up the little staircase. When she came down again, ceremoniously conducted to the door by the gallant critic, I saw that she was elderly, with distinctly-marked features and an

Italian rather than a French profile. The light down on her upper lip, which, in the days of her youth, had doubtless enhanced her charms, was now accentuated and less becoming. So, when we were alone, I could not help saying: 'That lady who came to see you has a very fine moustache.' 'Ah, yes,' he answered, with a melancholy smile. 'We are neither of us as young as we used to be.'"

So that it is clear that she forgave, and probable that she did not think that she had a great deal to forgive. If his behaviour had been bad, she had provoked it, and wished to lighten the blame by sharing it; and at least he had not behaved so badly, from her point of view, as her husband—for he had never overawed or intimidated her, and had never required her to sit at his feet (but had sat at hers), and had never forsaken her for a light o' love. And, therefore, sentiment had still survived when the age for passion was over—when they were neither of them as young as they had been—and Sainte-Beuve, hearing the news of her death, only a little before his own, could write of her as "the only constant friend I ever had in the world."

CHAPTER XXIX

Alexandre Dumas—His lack of sentimentalism—The manner of his life at the Villa Monte Cristo—And at Enghien—His graceless old age—His death—Prosper Mérimée—Reasons for classing him with the Romantics.

THERE were those among the Romantics whose passions were unworthy of the Movement; and of these we may take Alexandre Dumas the elder as the type. With him an affair with an actress was all in the day's work of a dramatic author, and an affair with a milliner all in the day's work of a man of letters. He was generally engaged in several such affairs simultaneously. That was how he unbent—if unbending be the word to apply to any of the movements of such a rollicking Bohemian—and took his pleasure. He never suffered through his amours, and he was never sentimental about them.

Certainly there was no sentiment involved in that first affair with a milliner (or was she a dressmaker?) which resulted in the birth of Alexandre Dumas the younger. The father accepted the child, to whom, indeed, he was sincerely attached, in the spirit in which a man accepts a prize which he has been lucky enough to draw in a lottery; but he felt no keener sense of personal obligation towards the mother than he would have felt towards the organizers of a lottery. He simply took the child from her, and left her, and went on his way rejoicing.

Alexandre Dumas

[*To face p.* 266

That was his attitude as an ardent and impetuous young man, and he cannot be said to have modified it appreciably in his prime. He never had a romantic attachment for any woman even then, but, liking the pleasures of *la vie galante*, indulged in them freely and ostentatiously. The ostentation may be said to have reached its climax when he took an actress, who was known to be his mistress, to a Court ball to which she had not been invited. The triumph of his personality was most complete when, having decided, for whatever reason, to marry the lady, he induced Chateaubriand to act as his best man. But, of course, he and his wife did not stay together very long ; and, of course, he continued, as a married man, to live pretty much as he had lived as a bachelor.

He was fond of women, it seems, much as some people are fond of children, and liked to have them about him. During the brief period in which he really was rich enough for any extravagance except the payment of his debts, he indulged his taste to the full ; and many maids of honour—if the word maids may pass—were comprised in the Court which surrounded him when he sat like a Pasha or Maharajah amid the Oriental splendours of his Villa Monte Cristo at Saint-Germain.

It was a lordly pleasure-house, tropical in its taste and its extravagance—a weird confusion of Bohemia and the Arabian Nights. The spoils of the bazaars of Algeria and Tunis lay about the house, commingled with costly treasures of home manufacture, in a supreme disorder ; and there was every embellishment which the caprices of a luxuriant and undisciplined imagination could suggest : Gothic turrets, pavilions,

minarets, an artificial lake with an island and a cascade, a picture gallery, a studio, an aviary, a monkey-house, a stable, a bijou theatre, a kiosk with a blue ceiling studded with stars to serve as a work-room for the master, who had the titles of his principal plays and stories graven conspicuously on the stones of his dwelling.

Naturally, seeing that Dumas had no money but what he earned, his pecuniary difficulties, even in that golden age, were incessant. The payment of his tradespeople was the last use to which he thought of putting money; he much preferred to distribute it in charity among undeserving persons who had no claim on him. He would keep a shoemaker waiting for fifty francs while he would subscribe a hundred francs to pay the funeral expenses of a bailiff. Consequently debts accumulated and duns knocked at the door. Their temper was not improved by the fact that one of Dumas's faithful servitors used to set booby traps for them, tampering with a plank bridge on which they had to cross a brook, with the result that they fell into the water, like the victims of a pirate on the high seas. They became more urgent, and sometimes had to be allowed to carry away commodities instead of cash. One creditor took away a vulture from the aviary, giving a receipt for fifteen francs on account; and things came to such a pitch that, according to Villemessant of the *Figaro*, Dumas's intimate friends could only obtain access to him by pretending to be bailiffs, and demanding admission in the name of the law.

He was doing more work at the time than the men of letters who lived decorously, once publishing, with the help of various collaborators, as many as sixty

volumes in a single year; and his house, during the same period, was full of predatory women who affected to be attached to him, and were permitted, in return for their supposed attachment, to help themselves from a bowl of gold coins which he kept upon the mantelpiece. It is not astonishing, in view of the nervous strain, that his moods were variable, and that he sometimes flew into a volcanic passion and turned one of the maids of honour out; but even so, he behaved well to them, according to his lights. It was, so to say, the custom of the house that they might take their bedroom furniture with them when they went, leaving their host to refurnish the apartment. The vans of the upholsterers were nearly always at the door.

It was magnificent, but it could not last. At the end of a few years, the creditors ended it in the usual way. They won their Waterloo, and overthrew their Napoleon, in the auction room; and Dumas could never again defy them in quite the same fearless fashion, though he waged guerilla warfare with them to the last. We need not follow all his vicissitudes, but may resume our view of him on his return to France, after a long residence in Italy.

He had gone there to join Garibaldi, and had arrived too late for the fighting, but not too late to wear a uniform. It is said that he designed it himself, and that it was the most gorgeous uniform in Garibaldi's army. Garibaldi had rewarded him for his moral support by appointing him Conservator of the Naples museums; but he had been too thoroughgoing a Garibaldian for Victor Emmanuel's police. So, finding his position uncomfortable, he had come

back ; and we will follow him to Enghien in the outskirts of Paris, where he took a villa for the summer, noting certain parallels and contrasts.

For the life at Enghien-les-Bains was, as it were, a poor and shabby imitation of the old life at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Then the Bohemianism had at least been magnificently gilded ; now the Bohemianism was the same as ever, but the gilt was coming off in strips. Dumas had grown a good deal older without growing any wiser. His fame and his popularity were impaired ; he could not earn money so easily, and, as the old weaknesses remained, he could only indulge them on a lower plane ; and the figure which he cuts is no longer that of a man of genius grandly defying all conventional restrictions, but rather that of a graceless old reprobate reduced to strange shifts to keep himself afloat.

Of course there was a *faux ménage* at Enghien. It is impossible to think of Dumas without a *faux ménage*. But the character of his *faux ménage* has altered, and we now see him for the first time beginning to fall under the subjection of a woman's caprice. His mistress disturbed all his domestic arrangements, and, having musical tastes, flooded his house with professional musicians—a class of men whom he abhorred. Of course, too, there were parasites—Dumas never escaped from these. But they were parasites of an inferior quality—men and women who sponged on the master for lunches and then borrowed cab-fares. There is a story of five-and-twenty cabmen turning up on a single morning and asseverating that the master's guests had referred them to the master for the payment of their dues ; and, under such influences, the gaiety of

life diminished. The records are still absurd, but the laughter has a painfully hollow ring. The life of which they tell us is a practical joke which has ceased to be amusing because the high spirits and hilarity of youth have gone. A single anecdote may serve to show how sordid the Bohemianism had become, and how little of romance there was on its ostensibly romantic side.

Dumas had a secretary, a M. Pipteau, who wrote articles for him to sign, and M. Pipteau had a mistress. This lady conceived the idea that the lady at the head of Dumas's irregular establishment was supplanting her in M. Pipteau's affections. So little were forms and ceremonies observed in the house that the young woman was not only able to enter it, but even walked, together with M. Pipteau, into the bedroom of her supposed rival, and brought railing accusations against her. And Dumas, far from being indignant, found the incident amusing—a good story to tell to his friends. It is the lowest grade of Bohemianism—the ungilded Bohemianism of Daudet's *Sapho*. We will not follow it further, or linger over the melancholy picture of the last years when the Lord of Monte Cristo became a client of the pawnshops, sponged on the son of the woman whom he had betrayed and abandoned, eked out a precarious existence on small loans from publishers and dramatic agents, and let parasites rob him of the money which he had borrowed, just as, in the days of his glory, they had robbed him of the money which he earned, until he was taken to Puys to die during the Prussian occupation of Dieppe. Our final glimpse shall be at a career which differed from his almost as day from night—the career of Prosper Mérimée.

It might be argued, indeed, that Prosper Mérimée is not properly to be classed with the Romantics, and he certainly diverged very widely from their principles and practices before he died, living even to speculate whether Victor Hugo had been born mad, or had only gone mad in his old age. He had belonged to the school in his youth, however, and had even done good work for some of the causes which it represented. It has been said that his reports as Inspector of Historical Monuments, and Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* were the two forces which saved Gothic architecture in France; and that classes him whether the saying be true or not.

The fact that he was a scholar and a man of taste saved him from the worst extravagances of the school—or at all events, emancipated him from it at an early age. The influence of Stendhal, and of a social circle which was rather fashionable than either literary or artistic, may have been another safeguard; but he certainly fell among the Romantics, even if he did not grow up as one of them. He was quite Hugoesque for a while, worshipping local colour, as he confesses, until he found out how easy it was to get it up out of books; but he could not be Hugoesque in his life, because his temperament and Hugo's were fundamentally different.

There was, as we have seen, no "secret orchard" in Hugo's life. What should have been his secret orchard was, as it were, a park thrown open to excursionists. He did the honours of it, and showed the trippers round in person, drawing their attention to its beauties. Prosper Mérimée's procedure was the very opposite of that. He had his secret orchard—more

secret orchards than one, in fact—but he kept it secret, not only closing the door carefully behind him when he left it, but rarely even hinting of its existence to his dearest friends; so that his friends wondered.

His manner, to vary the metaphor, fashioned upon English models—he was, outwardly, at least, more like an Englishman than any other Frenchman who ever lived—was that of the impassive man who wears a mask, whether because he is afraid of "letting himself go," or because he is convinced that his inner life concerns no one but himself. It did not, of course, concern any one but himself and the women who were involved in it. But equally, of course—whether because he overdid the pose, or merely because he practised English reticence in the midst of French garrulity—curiosity was provoked; and then, as seems always to happen in these cases in France, the curiosity was gratified, at least in part, by a lady whose name Mérimée's most intimate associates had never heard him mention. There appeared, that is to say, only a very few years after his death, the famous *Lettres à une Inconnue;* and there was yet another addition to the world's stock of famous love stories.

The letters were real letters, written to a real woman, whose identity was presently to be disclosed, though she chose to make a mystery of it at first. Their publication, she told the one relative who was in her confidence, seemed to her "likely to do more good than harm," seeing that it would "make a great memory known and loved." Apparently she also thought that the publication would lift the mask, and show the real man behind it, and reveal the whole of Mérimée's secret life during the thirty years of her

acquaintance with him. If she had known that, even for her, he wore a second mask beneath the first, and that Mérimée had other secret orchards besides that in which she was entertained, well then, perhaps she would have burnt his letters instead of printing them.

CHAPTER XXX

Prosper Mérimée's official position—His Byronic pose—His reticence—His "secret orchards"—The "rats of the Opera"—A "Madame X."—The affair with George Sand—Cause of the rupture with George Sand—A second "Madame X."—Superseded in her affections by Maxime Du Camp—The *Lettres à une Inconnue.*

One tends to think of Prosper Mérimée as an aristocrat because, having known Empress Eugénie when she was still Mademoiselle de Montijo, he came to enjoy a privileged position at the Court of Napoleon III. He belonged, in fact, to that "high bourgeoisie" which established itself as the aristocracy of politics in the reign of the bourgeois king, Louis-Philippe: an aristocratic bourgeoisie, or bourgeois aristocracy, of which such men as Guizot and Thiers were the pillars. His grandfather had been the Duc de Broglie's estate agent; his father was an artist who also gave drawing lessons. Most of his own life was passed in the Civil Service; first as "chef de cabinet" to M. d'Argout, who was Minister successively of the Navy, of Commerce, and of the Interior; then as Inspector of Historical Monuments. Napoleon made him a Senator: a position which carried with it a stipend of £1,200 a year.

That is his official life in a nutshell. He had neither poverty nor riches, and he was not overworked. It is almost as if he drew a salary as a spectator, and

incidentally a reporter, of life. On the whole he earned it, if it be admitted that such services to the community are ever worth a stipend; and, as he was seven-and-twenty when the July Revolution put him in the way of his first appointment, he had already seen a good deal of life on his own account, and at his own expense, in the double capacity of literary enthusiast and young man about town.

Alike in literature and in life, his first model seems to have been Byron. Corsairs—the men of "one virtue and a thousand crimes"—appealed to him. The fundamental Byronism—the Byronism which raised the banner of revolt against priests and kings in general and the Holy Alliance in particular—was not in him; he liked his comfort, and cared very little for causes; but he dabbled in Byronism, albeit rather weakly, and affected a Byronic pose. He enjoyed, and even did something to justify, the reputation of a reprobate. It pleased him to be spoken of, with bated breath, as "the diabolic Mérimée"; and it also pleased him that the grounds for applying the epithet to him should be wrapped in impenetrable mystery. He liked, in short, to wear a mask, and leave the curious to guess whether, in reality, he was a man of boiling passions or only of cynical vices.

Probably he was neither, but rather a shy man with a nervous fear of ridicule and a horror of hypocrisy and humbug—a man who pretended to feel less than he did because he was afraid of pretending to feel more. The pose—if it was not too natural to him rightly to be called a pose—was more successful with women than with men. Men, with rare exceptions, did not like him; women, as a rule, did. He

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intrigued them, as men with a vague reputation for wickedness are apt to do. Each of them liked to think that he lifted the mask for her alone, or that, if he had not done so yet, he would be sure to do so presently. Moreover, they felt safe with him—felt, and indeed were quite warranted in feeling, that the secrecy of their secrets would be respected; and it was something, in the age in which George Sand and Alfred de Musset were making "copy" out of each other for Buloz, and Victor Hugo was celebrating his conquests in the *coulisses* in the same volume of verse in which he glorified the joys of domesticity, to have a lover who loved in accordance with the manners and tone of good society.

Mérimée indubitably did that. Nothing of his life is to be discovered in his books. He would rather, with all his love of letters, have written nothing than have put forth such a work as *Adolphe* or *Elle et Lui* or *Le Livre d'Amour* or *Chants du Crépuscule* or *La Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle*. "Some things are impossible to some men," and that was impossible to him. He kept the world out of his secret orchards, and he kept the secret orchards carefully separated from each other. The little that one knows, one only knows by accident, and one seldom knows a name. The Letters to an Unknown Lady are typical, though the unknown lady was mistaken in supposing, if she did suppose, that there were no other unknown ladies in the case.

First of all there were "the rats of the Opera"—so called presumably because of their habit of devouring the fortunes of their admirers; and here, of

course, one does not look for names. "The rats," Mérimée wrote to a friend in after years, "have their good qualities, but one must not ask them for more than they are capable of giving." He added that "they have souls just like honest women" and that "physically they have, as a rule, the advantage of honest women." It does not appear, however, that either his heart or his fortune, such as it was, suffered from his attentions to them, so that we may pass on.

The next *inconnue* was a married woman—the wife of a retired functionary of the First Empire. Some of the letters fell into the husband's hands, so that a duel was necessary. The story is told by the Comte d'Haussonville—

"'On which arm would you prefer to be slashed?'" demanded the hectoring husband.

"'On the left arm, if it is all the same to you,'" replied Mérimée with perfect coolness; and it was on his left arm that he received his wound which happily was not grave.

"A few days afterwards he called, with his arm in a sling, at a house in which he was intimate. The company crowded round him and wanted to know with whom he had fought and why.

"'I have been fighting,' he answered, 'with a gentleman who did not admire my prose style.'

"That was all that could be extracted from him."

The affair with George Sand succeeded; and of course it would be too much to expect that George Sand's part in such an adventure should remain unknown. She talked so much about it, according

to her habit, that Mérimée had the right to talk also, with the result that there is more than one version of the story. There is the story, for instance, that Mérimée was "given" to George Sand by Sainte-Beuve, and that she sent the donor a letter on the following morning, asking him to take back the gift. There is also George Sand's own statement that she had looked for "a warm and tender heart," and had been treated, instead, to "cold and contemptuous raillery." Finally, there is Mérimée's statement, which M. d'Haussonville reports—

"One morning, when Mérimée called on George Sand, in order to take her out, he waited in her bedroom while she was dressing in the adjoining *cabinet de toilette.* There was a table there, covered with papers. A large exercise-book contained the manuscript of *Lélia;* and there were some other scraps of manuscript, each with its title written on the first sheet. Mérimée began to pick up the papers, and read them aloud, commenting as he read. On one of the sheets was written *Marie Dorval.* It began thus: 'On the first occasion on which I saw her, Marie Dorval was wearing a white hat with a white feather in it . . .' He interrupted his reading to say to George Sand, 'How on earth can you be on these intimate terms with Madame Dorval?' George Sand, speaking from her dressing-room, defended her friend of the moment with vivacity while she dressed. Underneath this manuscript lay another. He picked it up, and began to read aloud, 'P. M. is five feet five inches in height . . .' George Sand had no sooner heard these words than she ran into the room, with

only half her clothes on, and snatched out of his hands, in spite of his resistance, the sheet of paper, of which he had read a few lines which may have been true, but were certainly far from complimentary."

There are no means of deciding—and it does not matter—which of the three variants of the story is true. Any one of them accounts for the subsequent coolness, and to George Sand's reply to Maxime Du Camp, who, years afterwards, tried to pump her on the subject, "Please do not speak to me about that man. The recollection of him is disgusting to me."

The recollection, however, whether disgusting or not, left no lasting trace on either life; and the next woman whom we meet in following Mérimée's career is another Madame X. There is little to be said about her except that she was married, and that her husband was complaisant, and that she and Mérimée loved each other, more or less, for eighteen years. He describes his position (though without saying that it is his) in a letter to his English friend, Mrs. Senior, as that of "the second husband whom one calls a lover," and who "generally lives on excellent terms with the first husband, and helps him to pass the time"—a combination which "makes a very happy family." But he continues, pointing out that French-women have not, as a rule, the temperament which such arrangements necessitate—

"Their dispositions are partly of the south and partly of the north. Sometimes they are carried away by their feelings, and sometimes they have qualms and

scruples. Observe what sometimes happens. Here are two people who really love each other, and have done so for so long that the world has ceased to pay the least attention to them. Then, one fine morning, the woman gets it into her head that the proceedings which have made her and another happy for ten years are wrong. 'We must separate,' she says. 'I still love you, but I do not want to see you any more.' That story is a true one. It happened to one of my friends."

The friend to whom it had happened was, as M. d'Haussonville points out in a footnote, himself; but he did not know the full truth about it till afterwards, and it may even be that he only guessed it then. "Remorse, perhaps, and yet I don't think the priests have anything to do with it," he once remarked; and he was right. It was not for the love of God, but for the love of his younger confrère in the Academy, Maxime Du Camp, that Madame X. had thrown him over. "It is a dream from which I am awakened," he said; and it is a question whether he ever dreamed again, though the recipient of the *Lettres à une Inconnue* would have us think so, and though many readers of those Letters have taken her at her word.

This brings us to the *Lettres à une Inconnue;* but the preface was necessary, since it contains the clue to much that, without it, would be puzzling.

Probably—and, indeed, almost certainly—the Unknown Lady was not herself in possession of that clue, though she may sometimes have guessed at it. It was not likely to have been given to her; and she did not

move in a circle in which she was likely to pick it up. If she had known the truth, she would, one imagines, have forced a crisis, and brought about a rupture—or else have acted on her moral impulses and bowed her lover out. Not knowing, she could be kept on tenterhooks, wondering to find Mérimée at one moment so pressing and at another so evasive, constantly quarrelling with him, yet as constantly making up her quarrel, trying to "change her manner," and breaking down in the attempt, expecting, hoping, letting things drag on. But it will be better to tell the story, and let these things appear in their proper place.

First, then, of the identity of the Unknown Lady—a problem which long intrigued and baffled the curious, but of which the full and final answer, with evidence in support, may be read in M. Alphonse Lefebvre's recently published work, *La célèbre Inconnue de Prosper Mérimée.* (Paris. Sansot, 1908.)

CHAPTER XXXI

The "Inconnue" identified as Jenny Dacquin—The first letter—The first meeting—The game of cross-purposes—Mérimée scores the first trick—And also the second—The reason why he would not marry Jenny—Jenny comes to Paris.

THE Unknown Lady was a Mademoiselle Jenny Dacquin of Boulogne-sur-Mer, where she was born in 1811. Her father was an advocate and notary; her mother's family belonged to a family of brewers and wine merchants, long established in the town. Like Mérimée, that is to say, she was of the *bourgeoisie* but not, if invidious distinctions are to be drawn—and Mérimée was a man to draw them—of a *bourgeoisie* quite so "good" or "high" as that from which he claimed descent. She received a good education—much of it at an English boarding-school; and when her father's early death reduced her mother's income, she was able to take situations in England as governess and lady companion. She also wrote a little—more for amusement than for money; and a set of verses from her pen appeared in the same number of the *Annales Romantiques* as one of Mérimée's short stories.

It is not before the forties that the Letters present her as Mérimée's correspondent; but that only means that the early letters have, for whatever reason—whether because they were too ardent, or because

they were too trivial—been suppressed. The acquaintance, in fact, began much sooner, though the circumstances of its commencement—and of the first interview in particular—were such that one can understand Mademoiselle Dacquin's hesitation in referring to them. Her first letter, as M. Alfred Hédouin of Boulogne, who posted it for her, has stated in the *Intermédiaire des Chercheurs*, was written in October 1831. She only wanted, in the first instance, M. Hédouin says, to obtain Mérimée's autograph for her collection ; but Mérimée's reply was such that a forty years' correspondence grew out of it.

She had written in English, under the assumed name of Lady Algernon Seymour ; and as Mérimée was an anglomaniac who went to Poole for his clothes, that accident may have helped to quicken his curiosity. At all events, it was his whim, if not his burning desire, to see her, and, in January 1833, he saw her. The incident is described at length in a letter from Mérimée to his English friend, Sutton Sharpe, published in the *Mercure de France* in February 1908.

Mademoiselle Dacquin, who was still, at that date, calling herself Lady Algernon Seymour, had charged a friend to send Mérimée her portrait. On his return from a trip to England he met this friend, a middle-aged lady, at Calais. She handed him a letter from his mysterious correspondent, and went on to tell him all about her—

"You must understand that the letters which have puzzled you come, not from a married Englishwoman, but from an unmarried French girl. This young person is very silly and excitable, but also quite good

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and virtuous. When she wrote to you for the first time, she wanted nothing but your autograph. By degrees she fell in love, first with the correspondence, and then with the correspondent. The thing has become a veritable passion with her ; in a word, she is mad about you. Her mother and I at first acquiesced in her foolishness, not supposing it to be serious, but now we are in despair about it."

"But what can I do?" Mérimée asked; and he went on to say that he was not a marrying man, that he had not sought the young lady's acquaintance, that he really must disclaim all responsibility in the matter, etc., etc., etc. ; but Madame L—— persisted—

"She assured me that there was no question of marriage, and no thought of such a thing in their minds, but said that I had turned the poor child's head, and that they implored me to cure her. A nice commission, was it not? Next, Madame L—— showed me three or four letters which she had received from the young lady, whom I will call J——,—letters which would have melted the heart even of a barbarian like yourself—letters full of the romantic nonsense of a provincial maiden who has got it into her head that I am a hero, a sun in the sky, and all the rest of it."

Then, after Jenny's letters had been read, Jenny's mother's letters were brought out ; and it appeared that Jenny had succeeded in bringing her mother over to her point of view. The worthy lady asked whether Mérimée would "consent" to meet her daughter after the deception which had been practised on him. He

"assumed a very grave air," saying that he thought he had better do nothing to appear to be encouraging a hopeless passion; but he nevertheless allowed himself to be persuaded, "very pleased," he adds, "to seem to be compelled to take a course which I really wanted to take very badly," went to Boulogne, and sent a commissionaire with a note, soliciting a *tête-à-tête*.

"The reply" (he continues), "though nearly illegible, granted my request. I spent an hour in putting on my smartest necktie, and set out, much intrigued. I should add that, my friend Lagl—— having suggested that perhaps some sort of trap was being set for me, I armed myself with a sword-stick.

"I entered a house of fairly good appearance, and a servant showed me up into a tiny room, lighted only by a single candle, in front of which sat a woman whose features I could not see. When I came in, she rose to her feet, as if impelled by a spring, and then sat down again, holding a handkerchief in front of her face. I offered my hand; she gave me hers; and I sat down. Observe that the candle was so placed as to throw all its light on me, and that I could see no more than the outline of J——'s figure.

"We talked, and she had a very pleasant voice. . . . She struck me as a little shy, but quite intelligent. When we had talked for a quarter of an hour, I asked her to move the candle and place it between us. She refused, saying that, if she did, she would be afraid to talk to me; but after another quarter of an hour's interval, she consented.

"Then I perceived a very pretty little person of

twenty or thereabouts, a brunette, with splendid black eyes, magnificent eyebrows, black hair, etc. And then her little foot, as small as a finger, in a ravishing black satin shoe! The sight of it made me more in love than ever; and as we were both bending over the fire, she pushed it out from under her skirt, showing a pretty little ankle to match. 'It is so long since I saw a pretty foot,' I said, 'that I cannot keep my eyes off yours.' 'Do you really think it pretty?' she asked?' advancing it coquettishly, like a child. I took it in my hand, and, in the act of talking high morality—for we had come to that—I yielded to temptation, and lifted the foot to my mouth, and kissed it very tenderly."

The obvious comment on that story is that a young man who not only kisses the foot of an infatuated young woman, but kisses it "very tenderly," is hardly fulfilling his promise to do his best to cure her of an infatuation. It is no wonder that Jenny Dacquin "hung her head and flushed crimson." No doubt she imagined that all her romantic dreams were coming true, and expected a declaration to follow. One pictures her thinking that the declaration ought to have come first, yet not really minding very much because she felt sure that the declaration was coming in due course. And then one has to picture her surprise at finding that the declaration did not come at all.

"We talked of other things," Mérimée continues, "and I withdrew after two hours of chaste, albeit affectionate, conversation. She is coming to Paris in

a few months' time, and then it will be a great effort for my virtue to hold out. Meanwhile J——'s letters are becoming frequent, and I too am beginning to feel a little infatuated."

It is an interesting letter, not so much on account of the story which it tells as because of the way in which that story symbolizes the entire comedy of their two lives. Reading between the lines, one sees clearly that, from the very first, Jenny Dacquin meant one thing and Prosper Mérimée meant another. He wanted a mistress, and she wanted a husband, but he did not show his hand, and she did not show hers; and so they embarked on the game of cross-purposes, which we shall see them continuing to play until well after middle age.

For the moment, however, they had to interrupt the game almost as soon as they had begun it. The expected visit to Paris does not seem to have taken place, and Mérimée had no immediate opportunity of testing the strength of either his or Jenny's virtue. It was at about this date that Jenny went to England as a lady companion—a position which she continued to occupy for several years. Mérimée managed to meet her occasionally during the period, but only in the houses of common friends, and never alone. All that he remembered of those meetings, he told her afterwards, was that she had "striped stockings and wicked eyes." The wicked eyes, he said, constituted her special attraction for him.

Probably she wondered why, having kissed her foot, and having continued to correspond with her, and having taken some trouble to obtain invitations to

houses at which he could meet her, he did not make that expected declaration and ask her to marry him. Possibly she made excuses for him, reflecting that he was not rich, and that she was dowerless. It may even be that she was modest and doubted whether she was "good enough," according to the world's scale of values, for the distinguished man of letters who got his clothes from Poole, and moved as an equal in the fashionable society which she had only entered as a wage-earner. Yet we can see her trying—playing such cards as she holds, to the very best of her ability.

The published letters begin, in fact, with indications that such an attempt is in progress. The report—quite baseless—so far as one can discover—is transmitted to Mérimée that she is engaged to be married to some one else; not, it is said, an uncommon stratagem in such cases, but not a stratagem which could entrap such an old hand as Mérimée. He did not write that he was heart-broken at the prospect of never seeing the striped stockings and the wicked eyes again. On the contrary he wrote—

"Lady M—— told me yesterday that you were going to be married. In that case, you must burn my letters, and I will burn yours. I have told you what my principles are in these matters. They do not permit me to keep up such relations as ours with a married woman whom I have known when she was single, or with a widow whom I have known when she was married. I have observed that, when women change their condition, their attitude towards me changes too—and always for the worse. Rightly or wrongly, in short, I cannot bear my friends to get

married ; so, if you do so, we must forget each other. Don't be evasive about it, as you are apt to be, but speak out frankly."

That was all, but it served its purpose. The threat to marry, having proved ineffective, was dropped, and Mérimée had scored the first trick in the game. He also, and soon afterwards, scored the second trick.

The next thing that happened was that Jenny inherited a legacy, and wrote to Mérimée to say that she was now rich and her own mistress. It was another way of saying that she was eligible—that what she had supposed to be the one great obstacle was now removed—that it would no longer be a sacrifice, but, on the contrary, an advantage for Mérimée to marry her ; a most reasonable view, seeing that they had known each other so long, and knew each other so well, and had so many tastes in common.

Most men would have been embarrassed. Most men would have felt that they had been caught, at last, at the parting of the ways, and must turn either to the right or to the left, and either declare or repudiate "intentions." But Mérimée did neither. He stood at the parting of the ways, and did not budge, merely inviting Jenny to come and see him there. "So you are rich," he wrote. "I'm glad, and I congratulate you. Being rich, you will be free." But, though he enclosed a flower, and begged her to keep it ; he said nothing more explicit.

He could not ; nor could he give Jenny a reason for not doing so. He was in the midst of his long *liaison* with Madame X., and he could not

tell Jenny about that, any more than he could tell Madame X. about Jenny. What he wanted, therefore, was to develop his flirtation with Jenny, without committing himself to anything which would separate him from Madame X. It was difficult, seeing that Jenny, most evidently, wanted to marry him ; and if Jenny had been the ordinary *jeune fille*, it would have been impossible. Jenny's relatives would, in that case, have found out what was happening, and intervened with awkward questions.

Jenny, however, had not lived in England without learning a good deal there. She had learnt the taste for adventure and independence ; she had learnt that young people—and she was not so very young, being now about thirty—need not take their relatives into their confidence about everything. Above all she had learnt that, even for the unmarried, flirtation was an agreeable and permissible mode of activity, and often, if dexterously conducted, led to marriage in the end. So when Mérimée wrote to say that, unless they met, this protracted correspondence would presently become absurd, and had better be dropped, she took it as part of the game ; and when he wrote that she need not be in the least afraid of his falling in love with her, she took that as part of the game too. It was a challenge to the wicked eyes to do their worst ; and they should do it.

So Jenny came to Paris, and the game of cross-purposes entered upon a new and more critical phase.

CHAPTER XXXII

The acute phase in the game of cross-purposes—Secret meetings at the Louvre and in the suburbs—Quarrels and reconciliations —Age overtakes the lovers and the game is drawn—Mérimée's last letter to Jenny—His death—Did Jenny think she had been treated badly?

THE acute phase in the game of cross-purposes began about 1842, and lasted through the forties, and even a little beyond them: a period of frequent interviews, quarrels, reconciliations, and an alternate raising and damping of hopes. Whether Mérimée behaved badly —or how badly he behaved— is a moot point. Most women will probably blame him, and say that he "trifled" unscrupulously with a pure and innocent affection. Perhaps he did; but it would be quite possible to pity Jenny too much. She was quite capable, in the conventional sense, of "taking care of herself"; she was playing for a high stake in the face of an express warning that she would not be allowed to win it.

"You can trust me not to fall in love with you," was Mérimée's first promise, already quoted; and he repeated the promise many times, in variously-turned phrases. Disappointments and disenchantments, he said, had robbed him of his illusions. All that he could offer was "true Platonic friendship." Their acquaintance, commenced as it had been, could not lead to anything else. As for the idea of marriage,

he was very careful from the outset to speak emphatically, though indirectly, about that—

"Old as I am," he wrote (he was in fact thirty-eight), "I have ceased to be sensible to beauty. I have often wondered what I could find to say to a woman on my wedding night, and nothing has ever occurred to me unless it were perhaps to compliment her on her night-cap. Happily, however, the Devil will have to be very clever indeed to catch me at such a festival as that."

No one can say that the man who wrote like that did not lay the cards—or most of them—on the table before the game began; and it may fairly be urged that Jenny, having seen the cards, would have been wise to refuse to play. She chose to play, however, in spite of what she had seen; and it is not difficult to divine her reasons. The idea of "true Platonic friendship" attracted her—not as an end in itself, but as a stepping-stone to something better. Either she did not believe that Mérimée meant what he said, or she did not believe that he would always mean it. She saw a mark to aim at, and knew that she had batteries to unmask; she had confidence in the power of the striped stockings and the wicked eyes. So, when she came to Paris with her mother, she consented to deceive her mother, and to make appointments.

The first appointment was at the house of a common friend, the Comtesse de Ponthieu. The second was in Mérimée's box at the opera, to which he invited Jenny and her brother. "Make up some story, and tell me what it is beforehand, so as to explain my

presence," he wrote; and afterwards he thanked her for her "magnanimity" in accepting his invitation. "I appreciate as I should," he said, "your condescension in showing me your face for two hours, and it is only a tribute to truth to say that I admired it very much."

Perhaps she expected him, after that, to ask leave to call upon her mother and pay his addresses in the normal way. When she found that he only asked her to meet him somewhere alone, she hesitated, and told him that it was "wrong"; but she failed to score the expected trick by saying that. "If it is wrong for you to see me, is it not wrong for you to write to me?" he asked; and as there was a good deal of point in the insidious question, Jenny surrendered. Very well, she answered. If he insisted upon his own way, he must have it. She would meet him in one of the Louvre picture-galleries at two o'clock on Tuesday.

That was the third interview. The fourth was also at the Louvre, but in one of the quieter rooms, among the statuary; and the interviews which succeeded are too numerous for any score to be kept of them. Mérimée's policy was to draw Jenny by degrees farther and farther from the boulevards—farther and farther from the crowds. He first took her to feed the ostriches at the Jardin des Plantes, then to the suburbs, then to the woods and meadows. Each excursion in turn led them to a remoter solitude, until at last they lost their way and walked for an hour without meeting a single human being; and these, of course, were the occasions on which Jenny's ability to "take care of herself" was tested.

Nothing is more certain than that Jenny did take care of herself even in the midst of what Mérimée's

biographer calls her "virginal audacities"; nothing also is more certain than that she had need to do so. The letters—and a good many letters succeeded every walk—are not, as is natural, very explicit; but one can read between the lines, and the information which one detects by so reading is nearly always the same. The meeting always appears to have resulted in a quarrel; the proposal is always that they should meet yet again in order to make up the quarrel; but the grounds of the quarrel do not vary. Jenny is always complaining that Mérimée has presumed too far; Mérimée, on his part, is always complaining that Jenny, who can be so amiable when she chooses, had been "cold" and "like a statue."

The inference to be drawn from that is not obscure. The game of cross-purposes was proceeding. Each of the players was trying to lure the other on—the one to marriage, the other to certain concessions which marriage was not to sanctify; but they played with equal adroitness, enjoying the game too much for either of them ever to take any step which might frighten or provoke the other into declining to play any more. It does not even appear in the correspondence that Jenny allowed herself to be kissed, or that Mérimée insisted upon kissing her; but his promise to "be good" if she will consent to take another walk with him looks like an apologetic reference to some passage of the kind; and it is, at any rate, on record that he blew her a kiss—not too ostentatiously, one hopes—on the day of his reception "under the cupola" as a member of the French Academy of Letters.

Though the letters are many, indeed, the actual seizable facts of the relationship are few. We read, of

course, of the exchange of presents. Jenny gave Mérimée her portrait, and also, from time to time, embroidered purses for him. He, on his part, sent her flowers, picked in romantic sites—in the high Alps, for instance, and in the Vale of Tempe, and at Vaucluse, where Petrarch had loved Laura; and, when he was in Spain, he went so far as buy her a pair of garters—*honi soit qui mal y pense!* He also volunteered to accompany her to the dentist's, and, dentistry being, in those days, very far from painless, to hold her hand while she endured the agony. He even begged her to establish a literary salon, to which he proposed to introduce his friends; but she shunned the publicity and would not. Perhaps she thought of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse and her misfortunes, and was discouraged. And so the time passed, year after year, until they both grew elderly.

Neither of them yielded; both of them kept their initial points of view. In spite of those first tricks which Mérimée had won, their game of cross-purposes ended in a draw. It began as a flirtation, and it ended as a friendship, slipping into a friendship by imperceptible degrees, as the fierce ardour of youth, and the mitigated ardour of middle-age subsided. There was no supreme moment, no uncontrollable ecstasy of passion; consequently there was no reaction, no quarrel, no estrangement; and, though they had never married, they became almost like Darby and Joan.

About Jenny's reasons for not yielding we need not speculate. A chaste woman's chastity, even though she be a flirt, is not a thing which is supposed to call aloud for explanation. Her reasons for not breaking with Mérimée and marrying some one else—as she

easily might have, being a woman of property and attractive—are fairly easy to conjecture. It evidently took her a long time to realize that her wicked eyes, combined with her refusals and reserves, were not destined to triumph over Mérimée's hesitations. When she did realize it, and weighed the pros and cons of other matrimonial possibilities, the cons pressed down the scale.

She was provincial, and her family connections were with the provinces. Her husband, if she decided to console herself with a husband, would probably be some provincial doctor, or notary, or merchant; and what comfort was there in that? It would be a dull, albeit a reputable, end; and Mérimée had taught her better; and she had passed the age at which the passions are imperious lords and masters. She had not made quite what she had expected to make of her friendship; but it had become a habit, and meant more to her than any other human relationship, however intimate, ever could mean; and therefore she clung to it, though the illusions which had once gilded it were gone.

What Mérimée's reasons were for not marrying, we know, though Jenny did not. He wore a mask beneath his mask; but both masks have been lifted since his death. Even when he was testing Jenny's virtue with his audacities, Madame X. was in the way, and "faith unfaithful held him falsely true" to her. The question remains, of course, why he did not marry when Madame X. set him free, and sent him back his letters; but a plausible answer to that question also can be guessed.

Mérimée, by that time, was fifty, and a personage:

not an Academician only, but also a Senator, a pillar of Napoleon's court, a personal friend of Empress Eugénie, a Master of the Revels at Fontainebleau and Compiègne. He did not want to sacrifice the position, and Jenny Dacquin, the provincial notary's daughter, could hardly share it with him. She would have been out of her element at Court, even if she had been received there; ladies of greater social pretensions would have passed unkind remarks, and made her feel uncomfortable. Probably Mérimée, as a promoted bourgeois, thought more of the privileges of his position than if he had been born to them, and was more afraid than a man of higher rank would have been of making himself ridiculous.

Moreover, he was a man who liked to be "spoiled," as he said, not by one woman only but by several women simultaneously; and the women who so indulged his whims were numerous. There were women who insisted on corresponding with him; religious women who tried to coax him to be baptized[1] when he was well; sympathetic, sisterly women who nursed and cosseted him when he was ill. Two women in particular—Mrs. Ewers and her sister Miss Lagden—devoted as much of their lives to him as he would let them, without hope of reward. He was their "dear Prosper." They followed him every winter to Cannes, where he tried in vain to cure himself of emphysema and bronchitis; and when he went out into the woods, according to the doctor's orders, to practise archery and sketch in water-

[1] To one of the women who thus coaxed him he gave a conditional promise: "Yes, I will agree to be baptized if you will act as my godmother. I shall have to be dressed in white, and you will have to carry me in your arms."

colours, they trotted after him, one of them carrying the bow and arrows, and the other the palette and the paint-box.

Marriage—marriage with Jenny Dacquin, at all events—would have put an end to that sort of thing, and also to his participation in the pleasures of Compiègne; and the older he grew, the less he liked the thought that any of his ties should be broken. He did not love Jenny quite well enough to marry her, though he loved her too well to marry any one else.

No reader of the Letters can doubt that he set a high, and an increasing, value on his secret life; and he also seems to have felt that it must remain secret in order to preserve its value. So he let things drift, and they drifted.

Up to the last—he was sixty-seven when he died, and Jenny was then fifty-nine—we find him writing like a lover: sometimes like a lover who has declared himself longer ago that he can remember; sometimes like a lover who may be expected to declare himself to-morrow. She is always the person whom he is most anxious to see; she is always—owing to the secrecy of their relations—the person whom it is most difficult for him to see. He was sixty-four when he wrote that he was "dying to be allowed to call," but dared not, "for I am sure you would expect me to spend the night on the staircase."

At their age, one is tempted to say, he might surely have been allowed to call, for the meeting of two such elderly people could hardly have caused a scandal; but yet one can quite understand Jenny's thinking differently. The time having passed, and things having turned out otherwise than as she had expected, she

preferred to avoid all risks. The disclosure of ever so little might have involved the disclosure of a good deal more. If her friends had suddenly discovered that Mérimée—the "diabolic Mérimée"—was an old friend of hers, whom she had known for thirty years or more without telling them anything about it, she could not have relied upon them to think no evil. Even if they had not thought evil, they would at least have laughed, and pointed at her as a woman who had wasted her life and allowed a man to make a fool of her.

Very likely she knew that she had done so, and yet did not mind. Very likely she thought, balancing all considerations, that it was better to have been made a fool of by a man of genius than to have been the mother of the children of a provincial notary. At least Mérimée had fooled her pleasantly, and the game of cross-purposes had been worth playing, even though it had ended in a draw. But those thoughts, if she entertained them, were for herself, and not for her friends or for the world. Her secret must now be kept that her reputation might not suffer; and Mérimée had to keep it.

How deeply it grieved him to keep it we can only guess. The keeping of it meant, at any rate, that he could neither bequeath her a souvenir in his will nor summon her to his bedside when he felt that he was dying; and it is that fact which gives its special pathos to those last letters in which he tells her that he is ill, yet does not really let her know how ill he is. His thoughts, towards the end, were far more with her than with Mrs. Ewers and Miss Lagden, who nursed him, in ignorance even of her existence. He begged her, again and again, though without daring to give a

reason for his haste, to send quickly to his apartments for certain books which he wished her to take away and keep as a memento, and the last lines which he put on paper were addressed to her—

"I am very ill, my dear friend, so ill that it is a difficult matter for me to write. Still, I am a little better, and hope to write to you more in detail presently. Send to my rooms in Paris for the Letters of Madame de Sévigné and a Shakespeare. I was meaning to leave them with you, but went away in too great a hurry.

"Good-bye. I embrace you."

That is all. Mérimée was dead almost before the ink on the sheet was dry; and there shall be no spoiling of the pathos of the end by any further reference to the mask he wore even with the dearest of his friends, or any other further speculation as to whether he did or did not treat Jenny Dacquin badly.

That question, after all, is a question for her, and not for us; and her answer to it may be gathered from her expressions of sorrow to the one friend who knew her story and could offer sympathy, from her abstinence from all comment and complaint, and from her ultimate decision to publish the Letters as a fresh monument to her lover's glory. She had wished—no student of her story can be in any doubt as to what she had wished; but, having failed to win it, she had achieved the second-best, and been contented with it, feeling that a comparative failure in a high emprise is better than a cheap success.

She knew what might have been, and she did not

know all the reasons why it could not be. But she knew some of them, and her conduct seems to show that, on reflection, she recognized their force. Probably—and indeed apparently—she was too loyal to blame Mérimée, but threw such blame as there was to be thrown on circumstances; and truly this is a world in which circumstances often seem to have much to answer for, even to the breaking of hearts and the separation of souls which know themselves to be twin stars.

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